Kingdom Come

Curtis Sergeant

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Foreword

This is a story that may seem foreign to you today if you do not have experience in disaster relief or NGO work. It may, however, become all too familiar in the very near future.

Hopefully, this book will cause you to think, plan, and pray in a more focused and concrete manner about events and situations which Scripture tells us lie ahead.

In this account, you will encounter the following terms that may be unfamiliar:
Desk Four — Community Compliance & Assistance Unit (campus/municipal); enforces scan-first policies, Harmony outreach, and "safety" protocols at public nodes.
Desk Seven — Port & Border Adjudication Desk; handles "review required" travelers and humanitarian exceptions; practical gatekeeper for exit bans and corridor access.

This book is constructed based on a Historic Premillennial eschatology. Please refer to the appendix for background information on this approach. I find this to be the most straightforward way to interpret biblical passages related to end times.

See the last page to find out more about following Jesus.

Maranatha! Come, Lord!

Curtis Sergeant, 2025

Prologue: The Commissioning

“The mind of a person plans his way,
But the Lord directs his steps.”
— Proverbs 16:9 (NASB2020)

Elena keeps her remarks short because commencement speeches grow like vines if you let them. The chapel smells like lilies and printer ink. A blue banner hangs beside a wooden cross—*Model United Nations* in serif letters, a globe stitched by twelve thread-thin meridians. Beneath it sit the ten seniors who turned debate rounds into friendships and position papers into prayer lists. Caps are on the pew beside them; they promised her they’d wear them on the official stage and not in this room.

“Most programs end with a vote,” she says, voice steady, the way she learned to make it when microphones betray. “Ours ends with a sending.”

They know the routine: one last MUN roll call, except this time nobody switches placards in a late-night prank. They keep the countries they carried all year and carry them farther than a dais. The idea began as a grant proposal in a coffee shop; it became a clause in the school’s global-service charter; it grew into real plane tickets and real names on insurance forms. The shorthand stuck: *the Fellows*. She hates branding and loves that this one acts like a verb.

She calls names. Each student watches from her eyes as each student stands, and the room edits itself around them.

“Noam Ben-Levi —Israel, Jerusalem.” He rises shyly, as if attention is a scarce resource. He argued procedure like a surgeon, then spent coffee breaks teaching freshmen to listen. Elena continues, “Placement: *Siloam Media Initiative*—a small press office that tells true stories even when algorithms prefer fiction.” He grins at the floor.

“Mariam Naguib —Egypt, Cairo.” She’s poised without trying, a NICU volunteer who did rounds and midterms in the same week. “Placement: *St. Anselm Health Network*—pediatrics rotation, neonatal triage.” The nursing dean dabs her eyes behind Elena’s shoulder.

“Amal Deng —Sudan, Khartoum.” Compassion with steel in it. “Placement: *Mercy Plains Relief*—cholera prevention, community clinic training.”

“Yonatan Tesfaye (Yoni) —Ethiopia, Addis Ababa.” The camp-engineer brain in a poet’s body. “Placement: *Blue Nile Development*—water and sanitation, off-grid infrastructure.”

“Lina Al-Masri —Libya, Tripoli.” Quick hands, quicker smile, patience under fire in scrimmages. “Placement: *Haven Clinics*—mobile medicine & comms.”

“Kerem Demir —Türkiye, Istanbul.” He transferred in through a semester abroad and never left the team. Logistics as love language. “Placement: *Anatolia Aid & Culture*—supply chain, corridor compliance.”

“Dmitri Sokolov —Russia, Moscow.” Dry humor, stubborn integrity; his papers felt like smuggled letters. “Placement: *Volkova Institute (Research)*—

public ethics desk; he insists on keeping a conscience." A laugh ripples; he half bows.

"Jia Li —China, Beijing." Quiet voice, unflinching eyes. "Placement: *New Leaf Literacy*—community tutoring and translation." Elena swallows; she asks God—again—to let wisdom and courage share the same apartment.

"Arash Farzaneh —Iran, Tehran." He learned Persian in three semesters because he hated waiting for subtitles. "Placement: *Cedar Forum*—think-tank internship, civil society portfolio."

"Arun Matthew Varghese —India, Delhi." Rhetoric like a bell, gentleness hiding in jokes. "Placement: *Sarvodaya Trust*—campus outreach and debate coaching."

Ten. Ten placements. Ten countries that do not know they're about to be loved intelligently.

She reviews the last mile—how, after Nationals, they pitched themselves not to embassies but to the sort of small, fictionalized stand-ins that move real mercy: press offices, clinics, relief warehouses, think tanks, cultural desks, an ag-tech proof-plot outside Addis, a hospital wing in Cairo.

The "Global Council" is still a committee with a logo at this point, and the talk of biometric wallets is still pilot language in Brussels and Beijing, but the students have the sense to treat rumors like weather reports. Elena taught them a rule: plan with maps, decide with Scripture, walk with people.

She hands out the packets—airline confirmations; an austere page called *Field Covenant* that reads like kindness with a spine; a laminated card with emergency numbers and a verse. She saves the sat phones for last. They're not brand-named in any way that matters; they fit in a cereal-box secret pocket if needed.

"These are for windows," she says. "Ten minutes after dawn, ten before dusk, unless a crisis opens the line. We will assume jamming and blackouts at some point. We will do "old-school," too: dead drops, church basements, wrinkled maps, friends of friends."

The liaison map lives in her briefcase—a spreadsheet only in theory. In practice, it's 200 coffee dates and three decades of alumni who kept their promises. If a crate needs to cross a border, somebody's aunt in Thessaloniki knows a captain. If a clinic needs a generator part, a choir in Queens can label it *candlesticks* and no one will argue. If a student needs extraction, there is a quiet chain of pastors and imams and bus drivers who owe Elena nothing and behave as if they owe her everything.

She's not just their faculty supervisor; she is the liaison, sometimes mother hen, sometimes air-traffic control, always a witness.

She doesn't sermonize; she names what they're actually doing. "You're graduating," she says. "Tonight you'll walk the official stage. Tomorrow you fly. You'll intern in the countries you've been representing all year. You'll sit in offices that smell like old paper and possibility. You'll discover an NGO is three people and

a spreadsheet. You'll find a church in a living room that has better governance than most parliaments. You will be tempted to post when you should pray. You will be tempted to hide when you should speak. You'll be tempted to speak when you should serve quietly. The Spirit is good at specifics. Listen."

They laugh because it's true. Some wipe tears because the future has suddenly gained weight.

She gives the rules softly. "Don't freelance heroics. Obedience beats cleverness. Choose people over posts. If it's a choice between a shipment and a statement, pick the shipment. If it's between winning an argument and telling the truth with love, pick the truth with love. When in doubt, Psalm 27, Psalm 46, Micah 6:8."

A hand goes up—the habit of a team that respects process. It's Noam. "Do we keep the MUN thread?"

She smiles. "We keep it—an encrypted channel and group prayer. Archive off-grid. Sober details, warm hearts. Assume every text will be read by God and, eventually, historians."

Jia asks the question nobody wants to ask, but everyone thought. "If pressure comes… if it costs—"

Elena doesn't rescue the sentence. "We are Christ's," she says. "We don't sensationalize. We don't go looking for martyrdom. We do not run from obedience or from wisdom. We ask for daily bread. We tell the truth. We rely on local mentors. We remember we are guests."

She lays her hands on the stack of sat phones. Her prayer is simple. “Jesus, keep their ankles. Give them clean yeses and clean noes. Make them small and useful. Protect the people they serve. Write Your name over their routes.”

The *amen* feels like something signed.

Afterward, they spill into the hall for borrowed cookies and paper cups of bad lemonade that tastes exactly like beginnings. Amal pilots her mother through a cluster of well-wishers. Yoni sketches a pump on a napkin for a freshman who doesn’t yet understand that he will also need to learn jokes for children. Kerem swaps numbers with a visiting Turkish pastor who knows what a corridor is. Mariam tucks two extra granola bars into Jia’s hand. Dmitri takes the sat phone like a sacrament. Arash laughs with a campus janitor in Farsi because hospitality is a language. Lina snaps a photo no one will ever post. Arun teaches a sophomore how to tie a scarf on a pole as a visual aid and doesn’t explain the other reason you keep a pole handy.

Elena watches and memorizes. Faculty supervisor, yes. Mentor, liaison, auntie—also yes. She is not the center; she is the hinge. Her Queens basement circle will meet the night after they fly; the maps will be unrolled; the lantern will be lit because they like metaphors; someone will ask if it’s okay to be afraid, and she will say, “Yes. Bring it to the Lord and to each other.”

Outside, the campus green fills with parents and mortarboards. A dean asks Elena if she’s “comfortable

with the risk profile." She answers in two languages at once: the one deans speak, and the one the Church speaks. "We take counsel. We take care. We do not take our hands off the plow."

Later, in her apartment, she opens her laptop and types the subject line she's used every May for ten years: *Fellows Commissioned*. Under it, just names and cities:

- Noam — Jerusalem (Siloam Media Initiative)
- Mariam — Cairo (St. Anselm Health Network)
- Amal — Khartoum (Mercy Plains Relief)
- Yoni — Addis Ababa (Blue Nile Development)
- Lina — Tripoli (Haven Clinics)
- Kerem — Istanbul (Anatolia Aid & Culture)
- Dmitri — Moscow (Volkova Institute, Ethics)
- Jia — Beijing (New Leaf Literacy)
- Arash — Tehran (Cedar Forum)
- Arun — Delhi (Sarvodaya Trust)

She adds one line at the bottom, a private liturgy she never shows the provost: *Lord, direct their steps*.

The sendoff service ends. The official commencement begins. Caps go on heads. Cameras flash. Parents cry good tears. Ten seats in a row sit briefly empty because the Fellows linger in the chapel doorway, saying a few last small things that will turn out to be large.

Tomorrow, terminals and gates and wheels up. Next week, borrowed apartments, first staff meetings, and maps with the wrong scale. Soon enough, blackouts and blockades and the kind of problems you can only solve with your hands. Later, a Council that will call control compassion, “pilot” programs for wallets that will call obedience convenience, checkpoints that teach theology. But tonight is simple: a banner, a cross, bad lemonade, and a promise.

Elena texts the thread one sentence before sleep: *Shoes by the door. Psalm 27 in your pocket. I’m here.* The dots appear, then settle into a row of *amens* in ten languages, and the project that will test every word begins like all good things do—in prayer, with friends, on purpose.

Act I: Foreshocks

1. Khartoum

“But let justice roll down like waters
And righteousness like an ever-flowing stream.”
— Amos 5:24 (NASB2020)

Amal hears the shell before anyone else does—just a pressure change through the concrete, a sudden stillness in the clinic that turns the fans into hissing snakes. She’s halfway down the corridor with a crate of gauze when the floor trembles. Dust shivers off the bare bulb. Someone cries out in Arabic; someone else in English says, “Was that—?”

Then the second round lands closer, and the glass in the pharmacy window breaks like ice in hot tea.

“Drill is live,” Amal says, louder than she means to. Her voice snaps. “Go! Go!”

They practiced this: triage tags already tied to the handle of each emergency satchel, gurneys unlocked, the courtyard gate’s chain loosened for the convoy. But in practice, drills never smell like diesel and burned plastic, never come with that harsh metallic taste of panic.

She thrusts the gauze crate into the arms of a teenage orderly. “Red tags front room, yellow in the hall. Everyone else to the wadi entrance.”

“Miss Amal!” A baby cries, a sound like a bird trapped under a tin roof, rising above sirens. Mariam—the Coptic nurse from Cairo on a three-week rotation—steps past Amal with a hush and a smile, scoops the

newborn from a grandmother's stiff arms, and doesn't say a word. The grandmother mutters a prayer that sounds like singing.

Another concussion. The clinic's generator coughs, then steadies. Amal feels the weight of the sat phone in her vest pocket as if it's a second heart. She wants to call the team—Yoni in Addis, Kerem in Istanbul, Noam in Jerusalem—wants to say, "It's starting". But the hallway is already filling with the dust of the city and the smell of blood.

"Convoy at the ready!" shouts Isaac, the logistics lead, one hand on a radio, the other on a clipboard stained with tea. "We move to Sector Four if the bridge holds. If the bridge doesn't hold, we go to the farm track."

"The militia is at the roundabout," someone yells from the courtyard. "They've set a tax."

"CBDC only," another voice adds, bitter and small. "No cash."

"Then we go the farm track," Amal says, and the words feel strange, like she is borrowing someone older's authority. She is eighteen, and she knows the roads better than most of the men with guns. She also knows the way fear hardens into bitterness if it sits too long.

She dodges into the supply room to grab the trauma roll and almost collides with the wall map—paper curling at the corners, pins marking wells and schools, and the blank places where no one will admit families are hiding. A verse is taped above it in someone else's handwriting: *Do not be overcome by evil, but*

overcome evil with good. She can't remember which letter that is—Romans?—but the words steady her hands.

In the courtyard, the sun is too bright. A pickup idles with its tailgate down and tarps ready. Amal and two volunteers load the trauma roll, the oxygen tank, and a cooler with insulin. A boy in a yellow football jersey tugs her sleeve. "My mother—she is bleeding—"

"Bring her." Amal helps lift the woman onto the truck bed. Blood is already pooling under her hip. Amal snaps a red tag on the woman's wrist and presses down on the wound. "Hold here. Hard."

"Where are you sending us?" the grandmother with the baby asks. Her eyes are clouded but fierce.

"South, toward the farms. Safer there." Amal forces a smile; she's not sure if it's true. "We'll meet you at the clinic outpost."

"You promise?"

"I will try," she says, and it's the only honest answer.

A crackle—bullets far off, then closer. The men at the gate start shouting. Amal can't see the roundabout, but she can see the fear ripple through the courtyard like a gust of wind through tall grass, invisible until it moves people.

"Amal!" Isaac tosses her a second sat phone. "If we get split."

She tucks it in. She glances up at the dusty rectangle of sky, and for a moment all the noise seems to recede. A prayer surfaces unbidden—no eloquence, just a

child's plea: "Lord, keep the bridge. Keep the bridge, and let the convoy pass."

They go.

The lead truck lurches forward. Amal rides standing, one hand on the cab roof, the other on the tarpaulin rope, scanning for movement. The street is a collage: shuttered stalls, flour-dust on a sack torn open, a moped abandoned at an angle, a stray dog licking a foil packet. Her mouth is dry. They turn toward the bridge.

At the roundabout, the militia's pickup blocks half the lane. Men with scarves over their faces wave people through on one side, stop them on the other. A young fighter, no older than Amal, points to a sign wired to a pole: *TAX – DIGITAL ONLY*. A QR code hangs beneath it, spray-painted onto a board.

Isaac leans out. "Medical convoy! We have red-tag patients!"

The young fighter glances at Amal, then at the bleeding woman on the truck bed, then at the baby. His eyes narrow; his jaw works. Behind him, an older man with a radio shakes his head. "No pass," he says in Arabic. "No payment, no pass."

"We have cash." Isaac holds up a wad of pounds.

"Useless," the older man says. He taps the QR with his knuckle. "Scan."

Amal sees the tremor in Isaac's hand. Their organization's wallet has been flagged for "verification." Frozen. She knows this; she wrote the

email asking why the generator parts were delayed and received the bland reply: *Pending compliance review*. She feels the situation tipping.

“Please,” Amal says, Arabic quick on her tongue. “Two minutes to cross. There are infants.” She tilts her head toward the baby in Mariam’s arms. “Do you have a sister? A mother?”

The young fighter looks away. The older man lifts his chin. “Go back.”

A mortar round whistles in the distance. Everyone flinches. Something in Amal tears. She thinks of Jesus telling a storm to hush and a sea to lie down as if it were a dog. She thinks of the verse over the map. She hears herself say, “If you stop us, they will die. And you will be responsible.”

The words hang in the sun, bright and merciless.

The older man’s radio crackles. He listens, frowns, then jerks his head at the young fighter. A shrug. The young man steps back, lifts the pole, makes a tiny gesture with his fingers—*go*—as if he can pretend he had no part in this mercy.

They go.

Over the river, the bridge holds. Amal breathes again and doesn’t dare look back. In the rearview mirror, she sees the roundabout shrinking, the men with scarves washed small by distance. The baby has fallen asleep. The woman with the hip wound is still alive.

Her vest buzzes. The sat phone vibrates again, then again. She taps the screen with her thumb.

Elena (DC/NY): Check-in. All students respond.
Kerem (Istanbul): Online. Straits tight.
Noam (Jerusalem): Online. Construction accelerates.
Jia (Beijing): Online. House-church tonight.
Arun (Delhi): Online. Wallet “upgrade” rumor.
Dmitri (Moscow): Online. Blackouts “maintenance.”
Lina (Tripoli): Online. Port closed.
Arash (Tehran): Online. Think tank whispers.
Yoni (Addis): Online. Convoy stuck.
Amal (Khartoum): Live drill. Bridge held. Moving south.
Mariam (Cairo): Online. Start tomorrow.

A dot blinks after her message. Then Elena again:

Proud of you. Keep your heads. The Lord sees.

Amal types, *Amen*, but doesn’t send it. The word is already moving through her like breath.

They turn off the asphalt onto the narrower farm track. Dust boils up, coating faces and lips. In the fields, women bend over sorghum, pretending not to hear the city. Amal looks at the sky again—shimmering heat, an indifferent blue—and feels a strange steadiness take root. She can’t name it yet, only that it is not from her.

2. Jerusalem

"Then I will bring them to My holy mountain,
And make them joyful in My house of prayer.
Their burnt offerings and their sacrifices will be acceptable on My altar;
For My house will be called a house of prayer for all the peoples."
— Isaiah 56:7 (NASB2020)

Noam holds his breath as the ram's horn sounds—not a shofar as in a festival, but a crisp practice call shot through walkie-talkies and timing sheets. The sound skims the scaffolding around the Court, catches on a cluster of microphones, and dissolves into the afternoon heat. Tourists lean forward against temporary railings; police lean back against barriers; a cat slips between stone blocks like a priest with better priorities.

He stands with a small group from the Jerusalem Civic Heritage Trust—his host—half archivists, half PR staff. Their badges open certain doors and close others. His job is to capture the day as "cultural history in motion," which is an elegant way of saying *film without making enemies*. He keeps the camera low, the profile smaller than his conviction.

A line of *kohanim*-descended volunteers, all in white, rehearse their steps. A priestly instructor murmurs corrections. The scaffolded altar—temporary, portable, clearly not final—waits like a question no one wants to answer first.

“Slow pan,” whispers Avner, the Trust’s senior videographer. “Show faces, not just stone.”

Noam obeys. He wants to catch light on linen, the nervous pride, the certainty that looks like humility in the older men and like challenge in the younger. He frames the shot and thinks of a thousand arguments he has heard and a thousand more he has not. He thinks: *What if this is the hinge?* He thinks: *What if this is the match?*

“Your hands are shaking,” Avner says quietly.

“I need more water.”

“You need to remember we are not the story.”

Noam doesn’t argue. He hears the words like a guardrail, not an order. His grandfather used to say something similar about politics, about soccer, about life: *First know which game you are playing. Then know whether you are on the field.* Today, the field is crowded, and the goals change when you look at them.

Past the barrier, a cluster of foreign correspondents trades rumors. One leans in toward another’s microphone. “—next week, sources say—” “—Global Council draft text—” “—EU TrustScore integrating PRC HarmonyID—” Names like smooth coins. Noam feels the old anger stir again like coals poked under ash. He breathes it down.

A small demonstration breaks out on the far side of the plaza. Chants arc up, then fade as police funnel people into designated lanes. A woman weeps—not loud, just the private breaking of a heart in public—and a younger man who might be her son holds her

elbows and murmurs something, then looks around in case someone is filming. Many someones are. Noam lowers his lens.

Avner touches his arm. “We capture ceremony, not conflict.”

“Ceremony is conflict,” Noam says before he can stop himself. Avner doesn’t flinch.

“That is a good line for when you write your novel,” Avner says dryly. “It is not a good line for our brief.”

They move with the tide of bodies. A religious councilman speaks to the press in careful phrases. A secular councilwoman speaks in careful frowns. A young American man in a sweatshirt with a Christian slogan tries to start a chant in English and is shushed by three different grandmothers.

Noam’s sat phone buzzes. He keeps it on vibrate and tucked low. A message from Elena:

Jerusalem friend—hydrate. Send 30-sec clip for archive before sunset.

He sends back a thumb’s up emoji, then deletes it and types: *Will do. Pray for peace on the mount.*

Always, she replies.

The rehearsal moves. A lamb bleats—nervous, then resigned. The sound cuts clean through Noam. He feels the weight of it in his chest like a stone. He forces his hands to be steady, to be professional. The instructor’s voice drops to a chant; other voices answer. Overhead, a drone hums, then another. Noam

tries to tell himself they are ordinary news drones, that no one is watching for more than video.

A thin man in a linen *tallit* comes to stand next to him where the police tape sags. He is perhaps in his fifties, with eyes like winter sun. “You are filming for the Trust,” the man says, not asking.

“Yes.”

“You love God,” the man says gently, still not asking.

Noam swallows. “I’m trying to.”

“Good.” The man’s eyes drift to the altar. “Love is better than zeal. But sometimes God gives both.”

Noam turns to look at him fully. “Do I know you?”

“You will.” The man smiles, then looks past Noam, and his smile fades. “There are men here who have come to make a ledger of what they hate.”

“Journalists?”

“Worse.” The man’s gaze flicks to a pair of men in dark suits standing apart, not quite aligned with any group. He touches the edge of his *tallit*, then bows his head a degree, as if listening. “Do you hear it?”

“Hear what?”

“The low note.” He taps his chest. “The one under the city.”

Noam almost laughs. Then he doesn’t. Under the hum of generators and voices and drones, there is a feeling like the moment before a train emerges from a tunnel —not sound exactly, more a pressure, a weight built

from a thousand years and some number beyond arithmetic.

“Water,” Avner says briskly, appearing at his shoulder with two small bottles. “Both of you. Sun is not your friend.”

The thin man accepts the bottle, nods his thanks, then murmurs, “Pray for the peace of Jerusalem.” He steps away. Noam watches him vanish into the human current and wonders how he knew the man’s voice would sound like Scripture before he heard the words.

By late afternoon, the rehearsal ends. The crowd thins. The plaza exhales. Noam walks with Avner back toward the Trust office through streets as narrow as throats. A newsstand headline floats in a plastic sleeve: *COUNCIL TO INTEGRATE DIGITAL ID—MARKET SURGES ON ‘STABILITY’*. He snaps a photo for the archive, for himself.

“Big month,” Avner says.

“Big lifetimes,” Noam answers.

At the office, Noam trims a thirty-second clip: linen in sun, hands steady on a knife, a shadow crossing the stones, a voice saying, “For all the peoples.” He sends it to Elena, to the archive, to a private folder he has named *Stones Crying Out*. He knows the folder name is melodramatic. He does not change it.

Evening comes on quickly, soft as a shawl. He meets his pastor, David, at a small café off a side street. The pastor’s Bible is battered; his tea is strong. They talk like men stepping around a sleeping child—gently, quietly, careful of what might wake.

“Young friend,” David says, “you must not pick a fight with every rumor.”

“I didn’t. I filmed linen.”

“You filmed history. History fights back.”

Noam smiles in spite of himself. “What do I do with this… feeling?” He presses his palm to his chest. “Like a door is about to open. Like I am supposed to be standing in a particular place when it does.”

“Pray.” David sips his tea. “And be faithful in small things. It is often how God tells us where to stand.”

On the way home, Noam walks along the edge of the Old City, his steps unconsciously matching the rhythm of the stones, the cadence of another people’s prayers. His sat phone buzzes again. A flood of check-ins from the team, photos from places he has never been: a line of trucks in Sudan throwing dust; a quiet clinic in Cairo lit by candles because the generator failed; a drab office in Moscow with a plant too green to be real.

He types: *Today felt like loading kindling. Pray we carry water, not matches.*
He hits send. Above him, a drone crosses the dark like a mechanical star. He wonders if it can see the small prayer on his screen, or only heat signatures and edges. He wonders if that will be the new vocabulary of truth: what is visible to machines and what is whispered to God.

3. Beijing

“So then those who were scattered went about preaching the word.”
— Acts 8:4 (NASB2020)

Jia Li times her walk by the blind spots—between cameras, under the drooping branch of a plane tree, across the alley where an ancient awning folds the street into a pocket of shadow. She carries nothing but her water bottle and a paper bag with buns. The buns are real. The meeting is real. The security, too.

The flat is on the fifth floor of a building that should have been torn down fifteen years ago and wasn’t because it is the kind of place that remembers your name if you forget your keys. A boy with a plastic dinosaur rides the stair rail down and crows like a rooster. A woman with a delivery uniform naps on the landing, phone on her chest like a small shield.

Jia knocks the pattern, soft: two, three, two. A scraping, a chain, the door opens a slice. Old eyes. Then the chain lifts.

“Come,” says Auntie Mei, the elder who has been the church’s backbone for forty years. “Quiet feet.”

Inside, fifteen people. A table with a kettle and three chipped cups. Bibles wrapped in cloth and tucked away between meetings. A young man in a shirt too small for his shoulders sits by the window pretending to scroll his phone. His other hand clenches and

unclenches like a fish that has not yet decided if it is caught.

“Jia,” Auntie Mei says, and hugs her for the length of a breath. “We will sing low. New neighbors.”

“Understood.”

Jia sits on the edge of a stool. She breathes. She prays the prayer that has become her reflex: *Lord, make me gentle and brave at the same time.* She texts Elena a single dot—check-in shorthand—then silences the sat phone and slides it under the leg of the table to keep it from buzzing on the wood. Her on-paper host, Horizon Cultural Exchange, thinks she is at a poetry event in Haidian.

They sing. No piano, no guitar, just the melody thin as thread and strong as rope. Words from a psalm, words from an old hymn—that one always makes her want to cry, and she does not because crying draws attention. The young man by the window does cry, silently, and she loves him for it in that way you love a brother you only meet in other people’s kitchens.

Auntie Mei opens the Bible. “Acts eight,” she says, voice steady. “They scatter. The word grows.” She talks about obedience that looks like flight but is really strategy, about the Spirit who tells Philip to go to a road and wait. “Sometimes you are told, ‘Go to the road.’ You do not know the chariot yet.” She smiles at Jia, not by name, just by eyes. Jia feels seen, humbled, and strengthened all at once.

After, they share buns, pour tea into the three cups, and pass them like treasure. Someone laughs softly.

Someone else fixes the loosened hinge with a dime and a screwdriver. The ordinary holiness of it makes Jia ache.

Her phone, under the table, vibrates once. Low setting. Only once. The pattern they agreed on for *do not go home*.

She goes very still.

Auntie Mei's hand is already on Jia's wrist, gentle iron. "Bathroom," she says in a voice meant for the room, and lifts her eyebrows twice: *two men*. Jia nods as if she needs to wash her hands. She steps into the tiny bathroom, turns on the tap, and brings the phone up into the towel's cave of cotton.

Ping: Door camera active. Two officers at the block entrance. Building sweep by floors.

She texts back a single letter—*K*—and tucks the phone into the waistband of her jeans.

Auntie Mei moves like water. "Time to end," she says, smiling, clapping her hands softly. "Neighbors sleep early." In two minutes, the room is clean of anything that declares church. The Bibles vanish into a hollow under the windowsill; the cups are back on a shelf behind jars of Sichuan pepper. Someone starts a conversation about soccer, loud enough for a hallway ear.

The knock comes. Not loud. Authoritative.

Auntie Mei opens the door halfway. "Good evening."

“Routine check,” the younger officer says, bored. His older partner’s eyes are never bored; they go everywhere. “Noise complaint.”

“Children,” Auntie Mei says, and gestures vaguely down the hall where, for this night and this hour, there are indeed children. “Would you like tea?”

“No. IDs.”

They all know the drill. Phones out, membership codes. The younger officer scans each screen. Jia’s digital ID glows the acceptable green. She has never been so grateful for Elena’s lecture on keeping the official apps clean and quarantining anything risky.

“Show us the balcony,” the older officer says.

“We do not have a balcony,” Auntie Mei replies, mournful and patient. She stands aside. He steps past her anyway. His shoulder brushes Jia’s. She forces her body to be calm. Her heart tries to pound its way out through her throat.

He looks at the sill, at the wall, at the kettle, at the hinge newly tightened. He looks at the young man with the too-small shirt, who has pulled a soccer app onto his screen and is watching a replay with the intensity of someone for whom goals are the safest thing to understand.

The older officer’s gaze returns to Jia. “You are foreign.”

“American,” she says softly, Mandarin bright and precise. “Study permit.”

“What do you study?”

“Language,” she says. It is not a lie.

“Sing something,” the younger officer says suddenly, and the older officer doesn’t rebuke him. “English.”

Jia smiles just enough to be polite. She sings one verse of a harmless folk song about a river and a bridge. Her voice does what it always does: it glows without showing off, fills the corners without touching the edges. The younger officer blinks. The older one does not.

“Good,” he says, not about the singing. “No balcony. No problem.” They leave without writing anything down. Their footsteps echo on the stairwell. The delivery woman on the landing snores softly.

Jia doesn’t breathe properly for thirty seconds. When she does, it is like surfacing. The room exhales with her.

“Scatter,” Auntie Mei says in a whisper. “Pairs, not singles. Back routes.”

Jia nods. She pairs with the young man by the window—name: Chen; job: data center; faith: three months old and bright as a coin. They go down the back stairs into the alley that smells like vinegary noodles and cigarettes. They turn left where they usually turn right. The cameras are smarter now, learning patterns, so patterns must be broken.

“Were you afraid?” Chen asks, voice too loud, then quieter. “Sorry.”

“Yes,” Jia says. “Fear is not the enemy. Lying is worse.”

He nods like she has given him a formula, and maybe she has, though she did not mean to. They pass the plane tree, then a market that is already closing. Jia buys two peaches with cash. The seller looks at the coins like they are relics. The CBDC scanner sits unused on the counter like a toy no child likes.

Her sat phone vibrates again, twice. *Safe route B.* They take it.

At the corner, she stops. The sky is the color of old paper. Somewhere a drone buzzes. Somewhere, a woman laughs. She thinks of Amal's message from Khartoum—*Bridge held*—and hopes for bridges everywhere. She thinks of Noam and wonders what the stones said to him today. She thinks of Acts 8 and Philip and the road with no destination given.

"Can I ask you something?" Chen says.

"Yes."

"Why sing, when it makes them notice you?"

She tucks a stray hair behind her ear. "Because some things are supposed to be noticed," she says. "Not by them. By Him."

They walk on. At her door, she palms the sat phone again, types to the group:

House-church intact. Routine check. We scattered. Pray for a man who asked me to sing.

Noam: Praying. Today felt like loading kindling.
Amal: We carried water.
Elena: You are seen. Rest, all of you.

Jia leans her forehead against the cool door for a second. Then she goes in, locks it, sets the sat phone on the table, and sings the hymn again, under her breath, for an audience of One.

4. Tehran

“Behold, You desire truth in the innermost being,
And in secret You will make wisdom known to me.”
— Psalm 51:6 (NASB2020)

Arash tapes a printed map under the glass of his desk because paper cannot be deleted by a keystroke. Tehran spreads in miniature: rings of highways like ripples from a stone. He draws four small circles—data centers, pilot clinics, a ministry complex that used to be an office block, and now hums all night. He doesn’t label them. He knows the codes by heart.

“Farzaneh,” his supervisor calls from the doorway, “security briefing in five.”

The Anahid Institute for Regional Studies is a think tank with careful manners: neutral wall colors, framed maps, and tea glasses that clink softly. The research they do is not always polite. Arash learned in week one that “pilot” doesn’t mean experiment; it means foregone conclusion dressed like a question.

The room for the briefing is windowless. A projector throws a neat rectangle of light on the wall. A deputy from the Digital Administration Office gives the talk, a young man with a perfect tie knot and a gaze like a lens cap: nothing gets in.

“HarmonyID integration,” the deputy says, “will streamline public services, reduce leakage, and protect the vulnerable from fraud.” Slides click. Bullet points bloom like polite flowers. “Phase one: biometric ID linked to CBDC wallets for public stipends and hospital subsidies. Phase two:

integration with transport passes and university access."

Someone asks, too lightly: "Opt-out?"

The deputy's smile is a stamp. "Opt-out means opt-out of services."

Arash writes nothing. He watches hands; he watches who looks at whom. He catalogues quiet.

After, in the corridor, his colleague Sadaf bumps his shoulder. "Your face," she says under her breath. "You wear your questions like a sign."

"I'm trying to shorten the list."

"You will merely hide it better." She glances at the ceiling camera. "Tea?"

They step into the courtyard, where the camera can't hear water. The fountain is dry this summer; a pigeon pecks at dust like faith. Sadaf leans on the low wall. "I have a cousin at a hospital named in the pilot. The doctors cry in the parking lot."

"Because they'll be regulated differently?"

"Because they'll be forced to choose at the point of care," she says. "Scan-first, treat second—or never. Protests will be called disinformation. Compliance flags will stick like burrs."

Arash nods. He feels the familiar slide toward paralysis—too many threads, too many consequences. He clenches his fist, releases it. *Truth in the inward parts.* The verse surfaces like a buoy.

He has homework for himself: take one step that is not analysis.

He finds it after work, in the back room of a small bakery that swears it closes at six and never does. The room smells like yeast and sugar and possibility. Three men play backgammon. A fourth reads a ten-day-old newspaper. In the corner sits Hossein, the friend of a friend who repairs radios and, when necessary, finds roads.

“You are the one with maps,” Hossein says without greeting.

“Everyone has maps,” Arash answers.

“Not like yours.” Hossein grins, then sobers. “We may need to move people who cannot scan. If they wait for appeals, they will die waiting.”

“We?” Arash echoes.

“You will decide when to stop pretending you are not *we*.” Hossein taps the table. “For now, you will memorize three numbers and then forget you did. When the day comes, you will call one and say, ‘I am Philip and I am waiting on the road.’ And you will tell me which road.”

Arash’s laugh is more breath than sound. “Acts eight,” he says.

“You read,” Hossein says, almost pleased. “Good.”

They trade numbers in a way that would look like a joke if someone watched without the audio. Arash pockets the scrap of paper, then burns it over a dish of tea. Ash clots, then loosens.

He walks home along a street where the lights flicker in an honest way—the grid is tired, not surveilled. He thinks of his grandmother, who used to tell him not to worry about tomorrow because today has enough trouble and because God is very good at tomorrow. He prays like a man testing the ground with every step.

At his apartment, he wedges the sat phone under a book to muffle the buzz and checks in with the team.

Arash: Hospital pilot briefed. “Opt-out” = no care. Laying roads, quietly.
Amal: If you need “patients,” we will send names.
Jia: Praying Acts-8 roads for you.
Elena: Proud of the prudence. Also proud of the courage. Keep both.

He types, then deletes, then types again to Elena privately: *When is analysis disobedience?*

Her reply takes a full minute. *When it keeps you from the step you already know you should take.*

He closes his eyes, breathes out, and chooses tomorrow’s small obedience: visit the pilot clinic. Watch who is turned away. Ask their names.

5. Delhi

“We must obey God rather than men.”
— Acts 5:29 (NASB2020)

Arun waits in the queue until his legs ache, then waits some more. The university gate shines with new scanners; the old guards still sit on their stools, but their eyes look past your face to the screen that decides. Green: enter. Yellow: desk four. Red: trouble.

When it’s his turn, he places his palm on the plate. The plate hums like a bee.

“Upgrade required,” the screen says in polite Hindi.

He smiles at the guard as if red tape were a charming national pastime. “Desk four?”

The guard nods without meeting his eyes. Desk four is a cubicle with a plant that must be plastic; it is too cheerful for the air in here. The woman behind the monitor chews gum as if it were her enemy.

“Your wallet,” she says.

“I have one.” He holds up his phone.

“Not upgraded.”

“I am a volunteer,” he says. “Community services. I don’t need stipends.”

She points at the screen. “Campus access requires an upgrade.”

He thinks of Jesus and coins and Caesar. He thinks of Daniel and lions and windows. He thinks of his cousin Pastor Mathew and his gentle voice that can cut

through mobs like a psalm. Arun breathes. “Then I will study outside the gate,” he says lightly.

She frowns at him like he is a smudge. “Your classes are inside.”

“My life is not.”

He steps out before she can decide to be offended. Outside the gate, the street sounds like India: horns conversing, vendors bargaining with a chorus of vowels, a scooter with three cousins and a goat. He laughs out loud, which is either bravery or foolishness and perhaps both.

His sat phone vibrates. He thumbs a message to the team:

Arun: Wallet “upgrade” now tied to campus access. Studying in the shade today.

Kerem: Turkey next, brother. EU corridors are already testing scores.
Noam: Hold your ground. Or move your ground with you.
Elena: Meet your pastor cousin today. Tell him the time feels shorter than the calendar.

Arun takes a bus to the church where Mathew serves. The building is ugly in the holy way: paint peeling, cross crooked, laughter spilling out anyway. Mathew hugs him so hard his ribs complain. Tea appears like a sacrament.

“They will make you choose small things first,” Mathew says. “Library access. Transit discounts. Then hospital entry. Then buying bread.”

“Then?” Arun asks.

“Then nothing,” Mathew says gently. “That is the point. But we will not reach nothing. We will reach deliverance.”

Arun watches the street from the church doorway. A boy sells balloons the colors of mango and marigold. Two policemen walk past in a way that pretends not to be a patrol. An old woman sits on a crate and feeds a dog good bread. The dog thanks her with his whole body.

“I want to be bold,” Arun says. “I don’t want to be reckless.”

“The difference is obedience,” Mathew says. “Ask God each day: *What is today’s courage?* He will show you where to stand. And where to kneel.”

They go out together. They visit three families who cannot scan. At the second flat, the door opens on a girl with henna fading on her hands. She is seven. She coughs the cough that knows your name. The mother twists her *dupatta* and will not look up.

“The clinic says we must upgrade,” the mother whispers.

“We have a doctor friend,” Mathew says. “We will see to her.”

“Will they arrest you?” the mother asks, as if asking about rain.

“Not today,” Mathew says, and his smile is sunlight. “And if they do another day, that day is also God’s.”

Back on the street, a small crowd gathers around a loud man on a soapbox. He talks about order and safety and how the mark is simply common sense, though he does not call it a mark. He calls it maturity. Arun feels a heat in his chest that could be anger or could be zeal. He steps forward, then checks himself. *Today's courage,* he remembers.

He crosses to the shade and starts a quieter talk with two students. "You will still be you," he says, "if you say no." He tells a parable about a compass. He quotes a verse without the reference, then gives it when they ask. One of them tears up and pretends it is the dust.

On the bus home, he looks at his palm and wonders how many choices it will be asked to make. He texts the team a photo of the scanner at the gate.

Jia: We sang Acts 8 today. Scatter and sow.
Amal: Bridge held. Keep crossing.
Elena: Arun, when the day for the window comes, keep it open.

He knows what she means: there will be a day when a video or a sentence must go out before anyone can stop it. He prays he will know that day, and that his boldness will be love.

At night, he sits on the flat roof and watches the city twine its lights like a necklace. He hums a hymn and lets it turn into prayer. A drone wanders across the constellations as if it belongs there. He lifts his hand and blesses the air it passes through, because blessing is what he can give and because men cannot outlaw it.

6. Istanbul

“Better is a little with righteousness
Than great income with injustice.”
— Proverbs 16:8 (NASB2020)

Kerem lives in the contradiction of Istanbul: continents shaking hands while men argue about which one is superior. His office at Anatolia Aid & Culture sits three tram stops from the water; his window shows ferries that look like toys and a bridge that pretends it will always hold.

This morning, the EU corridor app crashes again. The help desk replies with its usual cheer. *TrustScore will be restored shortly. Thank you for your patience as we serve you better.* Patience is a currency Kerem spends too quickly.

His supervisor, Murat, waves him in. Murat’s suit is too nice for an NGO, which is part of the problem. “New shipment stuck at Kapıkule,” Murat says. “Generators, water filters. Customs says paperwork is incomplete.”

“Incomplete or incorrect?” Kerem asks.

“Incorrect until we correct it.” Murat slides a folder across the desk. “A small fee to an expediter who understands the TrustScore queue.”

Kerem flips through the folder. The fee is not small if you make what he makes; it is small if you move what they move. He feels the old cynicism loosen his tongue. “We call it facilitation and sleep at night.”

“We call it survival and keep clinics open,” Murat replies, not unkindly. “You are young. You imagine roads without tolls. The rest of us drive.”

Kerem leaves with the folder and the feeling of a splinter under his nail. On the tram, he watches ads slide past: smiling faces, green check marks, a cartoon wallet shaking hands with a fingerprint. He thinks of Jesus and moneychangers and tables he did not overturn today.

At the warehouse, the team waits like racehorses at a gate. “Any news?” asks Ece, the quartermaster with a brain that can inventory while sleeping.

“Maybe,” Kerem says, and tells her the cost. She rolls her eyes. “We could buy another filter for that.”

“And lose five to delay,” he says. “Math is not righteous; it is arithmetic.”

She smirks. “You’re the poet today.”

They run a workaround: split the shipment on paper, mark a tranche as cultural equipment for a festival that does not exist yet, and will if anyone asks. Kerem hates the lie and loves the result. The convoy gets scheduled.

He eats *simit* on the dock, staring at the water. Across the strait, cranes nod their metal heads. He texts the team:

Kerem: EU TrustScore hiccups. “Expediter” culture thriving. Trying to keep our hands clean in a muddy river.

Arash: Some mud keeps people from drowning. Wash afterward.
Noam: Guard your heart while you guard the convoy.
Elena: Ethics check: adjust the plan if you must, but do not let expediency become policy. Call if you need a second voice in the room.

He pockets the phone as a man in a gray coat sits beside him uninvited. The coat smells like cigarettes and good cologne. “You work at Anatolia,” the man says. “I have a friend at Customs.”

“Everyone in this city has a friend at Customs.”

The man chuckles. “True. My friend is honest.”

“Then why does he work at Customs?” Kerem asks before he can knead the sarcasm into a joke. The man laughs harder.

“He is honest,” the man repeats, “and sick of dishonest men. He says a directive came from Brussels this week: *prioritize shipments from certified organizations with high public trust*. That means TrustScore, and TrustScore now has a back-end flag for ‘misinformation risk.’”

Kerem’s stomach tightens. “Defined how?”

“Defined by whomever is not you,” the man says. “Be tidy. Keep your public voice mild.” He stands.

Kerem says,“Tell your honest friend that honesty is getting expensive. Sometimes we split the bill.”

Kerem watches him go. He hates the feeling of being managed. He hates more the knowledge that he will now spend his afternoon softening a blog post that

calls a bribe a bribe. He writes it anyway, and he hates himself a little less for using plain words around the edges.

At night, he meets with a small circle at a café whose owner does not mind if men pray in the corner as long as they buy tea. The circle includes Ece, a translator named Hakan, and an older woman called Tía, though she is nobody's aunt. They pray short prayers. They make a list of families who cannot scan. They debate the ethics of paying a bribe to get insulin in. Tía ends the debate with a sentence Kerem writes down: "We will not baptize corruption. We will step around it carrying children."

He texts it to Elena. She sends back: *Yes.*

On the walk home, he stops on the bridge and watches black water pretend to be a mirror. A police boat hums by, its wake painting zigzags that look like lies. He opens his sat phone and types to the group:

We will not baptize corruption. We will step around it carrying children.

Amal: Say it again.
Jia: *Amen.*
Arun: Also, we will trip a few liars by accident.
Noam: And repent when we do it on purpose.

Kerem smiles into the wind. On a lower quay, a boy throws bread to fish that are too smart to surface. Kerem envies them for a second, then remembers he knows the Bread that does not run out. He prays, awkwardly and honestly, for clean hands and the

courage to get them dirty for love when he must—and the wisdom to know the difference.

7. Moscow

“The wicked flee when no one is pursuing,
But the righteous are bold as a lion.”
— Proverbs 28:1 (NASB2020)

Dmitri counts the cameras on his walk to work the way other people count their steps. One above the kiosk with the flowers that never wilt, two at the crosswalk that never changes in time, three on the corner where the old women sell seeds in winter and berries in summer, four—there’s the new one, tucked under the awning of Volkova Media & Research like a spider that drinks light.

“Morning,” says Alina at the front desk, not looking up from her screen.

“*Dobroye utro*,” he answers. Her nails click like castanets.

The office is modern in a way that tries too hard: glass walls, plants anxious in their perfection, art that looks like graphs and graphs that pretend to be art. Volkova publishes media explainers and data stories. Dmitri’s job is “research assistant,” which means everything from checking footnotes to making sure the company’s public feeds never make anyone with a badge angry.

Today, there is a meeting with Galina Volkova herself. She has a way of smiling like a headline—concise, controlled, memorable. “Friends,” she says, “two notes. First, increased scrutiny on ‘extremist’ rhetoric. Our software will help you catch unsafe nouns and adjectives. Second, we are cooperating with the

Ministry on ‘harmful disinformation.’ Use the dashboard tags.”

Dmitri keeps his face polite. The new dashboard blooms on his screen like an invasive plant. Words turn red if they could offend the algorithm. Pastor, church, revival, persecution all glow like coals. He changes *church network* to *legacy community structures* and hates himself efficiently.

At lunch he eats *pelmeni* in a cafeteria that smells like boiled history. He texts the team under the table.

Dmitri: New “extremist” filter at work. Words go red. We rewrite truth so machines approve it.

Kerem: Istanbul too—“misinformation risk” flags. Keep your soul words intact, brother.
Jia: Use code where you must; keep Scripture plain where you can.
Elena: Document what you see (off-grid). Save what you can’t say (for later).

He heads out to meet a source, a journalist who used to be loud and now isn’t. They walk the perimeter of a park where everything important is always under repair. “They want us to self-censor,” the man says without bitterness. “It is cheaper.”

“What’s the new line?” Dmitri asks.

“The line moves,” the man answers. “You step back enough times and you fall.”

They share a cigarette and neither smokes. Dmitri asks about a church on the watchlist. The man’s eyes flick to the construction crane like it might listen.

“Extremist designation pending,” he says softly. “They will try to make it retroactive.”

“Can we help them prepare?”

“You can tell them to pray with their windows shut,” the man says. “And then open them anyway.”

On the metro home, the car goes dark for three seconds. No panic. Everyone is used to maintenance. Dmitri counts his heartbeat: one, two, three, and the lights return like nothing ever happened. He thinks of darkness that is not an outage and how to live in it without becoming it.

That night, the house meeting is small. Babushka Irina pours tea from a chipped pot. A man with sawdust on his sleeves reads from John by memory because his eyes aren’t strong enough for the small print. Dmitri doesn’t sing loud; he doesn’t sing soft. He sings true. The words taste like bread.

After, he lingers to help Irina wash cups. “You should marry,” she says, as she has said every time since he turned sixteen.

“When the Lord introduces me,” he says, as he has said every time since he turned seventeen.

She harrumphs her approval. Then her face creases with something that is not age. “There is a list,” she whispers. “Names of those who pray. Be careful.”

“I am careful,” he says.

“Too careful,” she counters, and thwacks his wrist with a wet towel. “Be brave at least as often as you are clever.”

On his way down the stairs, he spots the shadow of a man on the landing below that does not match any body he knows. He pauses, listens to the building breathe. No footsteps—only the hum of a refrigerator and a TV two doors down. Paranoia is a room with too many doors, his mind says. Prudence is a lock on one, his grandmother's voice says back.

He takes the back exit. Outside, the air tastes like cold iron. He circles the block twice. At the corner, a police car idles. The young cop in the passenger seat taps on a tablet with concentration that looks like contempt.

Dmitri sends a location ping to the team: Shadowed? May be nothing.
Noam replies with a line from Psalm 121: *He will not allow your foot to slip*.
Amal adds: And if you do, He will teach you how to land.

He smiles despite the prickle between his shoulders.

In the morning, the "extremist" designation drops. Not on Irina's house group, but on a sister fellowship. The news crawls across the company dashboard with the neutral tone of evil in office clothes. Galina calls Dmitri in. "Compose a brief," she says. "Contextualize. Emphasize the need for order in volatile times."

"Understood," he says, and his tongue tastes like chalk.

He drafts two versions: the one they'll publish and the one he saves in a folder named *Light*. The draft he saves is the one that says the quiet part loud: that the state is afraid of songs in kitchens; that truth in small

rooms makes liars tremble in large ones; that boldness is mercy on its feet.

He prints the hidden draft and takes it to Irina. She reads it with her finger tracing the margin like a prayer. “Keep this for later,” she says, and tucks it in a flour tin. “Flour keeps things safe.”

On his way out, two men in plain coats step into his path. “Mr. Sokolov?” one asks.

He nods.

“Routine questions.”

He smiles like a headline. “Of course.” He texts Elena with one thumb as they walk: *Talking with friends of the state.*
Her reply: *Lion-hearted and serpent-wise. I’m here.*

Dmitri breathes and remembers Irina’s towel across his wrist. *Be brave at least as often as you are clever.* He chooses brave first and lets clever follow behind like a younger brother.

8. Cairo

“Let us not lose heart in doing good, for in due time we will reap if we do not grow weary.”
— Galatians 6:9 (NASB2020)

The generator coughs like a smoker and then quits. Mariam stands in the doorway of the NICU and feels the air change—the quiet that isn’t quiet, the weight of machines gone still. A nurse swears softly in Arabic and then repents with a kiss to a baby’s brow.

“Switch,” Mariam calls, and the team moves. Manual ventilation, hand on bag; flashlight between teeth; a doctor’s palm on a tiny chest, counting like a metronome. They’ve drilled this too, but drills don’t include the sound of mothers reminding God of His promises in voices that could split rock.

In the utility room, she kicks the generator with a shoe that was never designed for kicking. It coughs again and does not change its mind. The maintenance tech arrives with a wrench and a look that says the part they need sits on a customs shelf tagged with a QR code and a sigh.

“Thirty minutes,” he says. “If I cannibalize the dental suite.”

“Cannibalize it,” she says. “We’ll pray for teeth later.”

He grins despite everything. She texts the team:

Mariam: NICU on manual. Generator dead. Customs holding part—CBDC flag. Pray.

Kerem: I can try to route a spare from Istanbul—no promises.

Yoni: Addis is sending two techs north tomorrow. Hold on.
Elena: Praying. You know what to do in the meantime. Do not carry it alone.

She doesn't carry it alone. Nurses with decades in their hands steady the room. A teenage father prays in bad Arabic, and God ignores the grammar and hears the heart. Mariam rotates stations, checks color, and watches for fatigue in wrists and courage. She hums a hymn under her breath because it keeps time better than a clock.

When the generator stutters awake on the borrowed part, the whole room exhales. Someone starts laughing in the way laughter sounds when it is made of tears. Mariam leans her head against the cool paint and thanks God for electricity, as if it had just been invented.

In the corridor, a poster has appeared: *SUBSIDIES REQUIRE HARMONY ID UPGRADE.* Someone has written *NO* across it in Sharpie. Someone else has added *AMEN*. She smiles and keeps walking.

At lunch, she sits in the hospital courtyard with a cup of tea and a piece of bread that turns into three when you share. A young woman from radiology shows her a video on her phone: a crowd outside a pharmacy chanting for ration access; a man on the steps preaching "order through compliance." The caption reads: *Common Sense, Not Compulsion*. Ten minutes later, the chant flips without the caption changing—*Give us bread without the mark!* Same crowd. Same

steps. Different angle. The truth depends on where you stand.

"Be careful," the radiology tech says. "Crowds shift like the Nile."

"I stay with the babies," Mariam says. "They don't shift."

Her sat phone buzzes. Noam: *How fare the little ones?*
She sends a photo of a tiny foot: *Fighting. Like you.*
He replies with Isaiah 40: *He will carry the lambs in His arms.* She looks at the photo again and believes it.

After her shift, she takes a trolley to Shubra to visit a Coptic family Elena connected her with—a grandmother who prays psalms by heart, and a boy whose lungs need more from the world than the world easily gives. On the way, a street argument swells into a foam of elbows and phones. The words *traitor* and *patriot* hinge on the same syllables depending on the mouth that says them. Someone bumps Mariam hard; she steadies herself with a palm on a wall and chooses not to be angry.

At the flat, the grandmother kisses her six times, three per cheek, and feeds her enough to soften a soldier. They pray. The boy sleeps more easily tonight. On the way back, the crowd has relocated to a different corner to argue the same argument with new nouns.

Outside the hospital gate, a small group has gathered with signs. One reads: *NO MARK, NO MEDICINE? NO MERCY.* Another: *MY CHILD IS NOT A QR.* A counter-group on the curb chants *STABILITY SAVES*

LIVES and holds placards with printed check marks. It's not a riot; it's a tug-of-war with words. The police stand like parentheses around the sentence, not sure whether to close it.

A man in the "stability" group points at Mariam's badge. "Nurse!" he calls. "You know we need order!"

"We need insulin," she says, not loud, not soft.

He blinks, like he'd prepared for a different conversation. "Insulin comes faster with the system," he tries.

"It came today by prayer and a wrench," she answers. "Tomorrow by both, God willing."

"God won't fix generators," he says with the certainty of the untested.

"God made the man who can," she says, and leaves him with that catechism.

In the break room a note waits from the matron: *You carry too much. Share it.* The matron's pen has a way of sounding like Scripture when she's right.

Mariam sits, finally, and texts the team:

Babies breathing. Borrowed part. Customs still blocking. Crowds are noisy, not violent—yet. Pray for peace, wisdom.

Noam: For you: strength and gentleness in the same hand.
Arash: Will ask our back roads if a part can fly over the desert.

Elena: Mariam, find three babies to carry with you this week. Name them now.

She names them out loud: “Aisha, Hany, Rawda.” Saying their names steadies her like putting pegs in a tent before the wind starts. She washes her hands in water that is briefly hot, thanks God again for borrowed electricity, and goes back to the ward where tiny chests rise and fall like answered prayer.

9. Tripoli

“The Lord is good,
A stronghold in the day of trouble,
And He knows those who take refuge in Him.”
— Nahum 1:7 (NASB2020)

Lina learns the port’s moods the way fishermen learn wind. Today, the cranes move like tired animals. The harbor smells of diesel and cumin and a rumor that is about to be true. She adjusts the strap of her first-aid kit and checks the drone case. Batteries full. Lenses clean. Heart—don’t ask.

Sirte Community Health runs three clinics and a van that is mostly a clinic if you don’t look too closely. Her job floats: triage, inventory, deliveries to homes where people would rather not be seen coming or going. Today she’s at the port to meet a shipment that might be medicine, might be generators, might be nothing. The militia has started taxing cargo *CBDC only*, and half the city doesn’t scan.

“Any news?” she asks Yusuf, the dock foreman who keeps rules in one hand and mercy in the other.

He shrugs without moving his shoulders. “The ship is outside the breakwater. Waiting for clearance. Clearance is waiting for money. Money is waiting for a green check mark.”

“So we wait,” she says.

“So we wait,” he agrees, and spits neatly into the sea.

Her sat phone ticks.

Amal: Port closed on our end earlier this week. Praying yours opens.
Lina: If not, we swim.
Amal: You would.

She unpacks the drone and runs it up to a hundred meters. The view sharpens: gray-green water, a ship loitering like a guilty thought, three pickups at the gate with masked men pretending not to be police. She records, saves, and sends a low-res clip to Elena with a note: *Stalemate.* Elena's reply: *Document everything. Don't poke bears unless you mean to.*

At noon, the rumor becomes true. The port closes. The gate guards pull the chain. A crane freezes mid-arc like a gesture left unfinished. The ship outside the breakwater makes a slow, sorrowing turn. The men in the pickups position themselves to be efficient.

The crowd builds in the way crowds do here—quietly at first, then with the suddenness of a wave that looked like a ripple until it stood up. Traders, truckers, mothers, and children who should be in school because school would keep them from learning this choreography. A chant starts, dies, starts again with better scansion.

Yusuf mutters, "I hate this dance." Lina nods. She hates it because crowds are crowds, and in crowds, blame is a spark looking for dry grass.

A child trips. She reaches him before his knees register pain, cleans the scrape with water, blows on it like her mother did, sends him back to his brother with a piece of mint candy she shouldn't carry and

does. The brother nods like an adult and shepherds him away.

At the gate, a man with a megaphone says something about order and taxes and the good of the city. He doesn't say *mark,* and everyone hears it. A woman shouts back about babies and insulin and the fact that her mother didn't need a QR code to be a person. Phones go up. Truth becomes pixels.

A masked militiaman points at Lina's drone case. "You," he says.

"I'm medical," she answers, holding up her badge.

"Medical can film?" he asks.

"Medical can document delays that cost lives," she says, and watches the idea land and wobble in his mind.

"Put it away," he says, not sure if it's an order or a favor.

She does, because today is not a poke-bears day. She texts Kerem: *Port shut. We'll need that generator overland.*
Kerem: *Working routes. Keep your profile low.*
Lina: *Low is my middle name.*
Kerem: *I thought it was Trouble.*

She snorts. "Both," she says to herself, and that is when the first bottle flies. It was not thrown at anyone; it was thrown at air heavy with frustration. It breaks like a bad promise. The crowd flinches as one. The pickups reposition.

“Back,” Yusuf says. She steps back. The crowd surges forward, then sideways, then forward again. The chain on the gate draws a clean line between Maybe and No. The masked men raise their weapons. Lina feels the moment when a crowd becomes a stampede and prays it doesn’t.

A voice at her shoulder says, “Come,” and she turns to see an old woman with eyes like wet stone. The woman takes her by the elbow with surprising strength and drags her into a side alley that smells of onions and sea rot. “You have the face of one who thinks she must save a port,” the woman says. “You cannot.”

“I can save some knees from infection,” Lina says, breathless.

“Do that,” the woman says, pleased. “And don’t get shot.”

They emerge two blocks away, where the crowd thins into individuals again. Lina sets up a small first-aid station on a crate and cleans small hurts and two large ones while the chant surges and ebbs like a tide. She prays in Arabic and English, and the wordless language of hands that are trying to help.

A boy—nineteen, maybe—stumbles to her with a cut on his cheek and a look that is half bravado, half “please be kind.” She cleans the cut. He watches her like he is trying to decide if her face is an enemy’s. “Why don’t you scan?” he asks abruptly.

“Why do you?” she counters, not unkindly.

“Because I like eating,” he says.

“So do I,” she replies. “I just don’t want to pay with my soul.”

He blinks, then laughs and winces because laughing pulls the cut. “You’re one of those.”

“I’m one of His,” she says quietly.

He doesn’t know what to do with that, so he pockets it like a coin and wanders back to the edge of the crowd.

By late afternoon, the tension blows sideways instead of up. The men in pickups arrest five and let a hundred go as if magnanimity can be counted. The ship outside the breakwater is gone. The cranes settle into silhouettes. The chain stays on the gate.

Lina helps Yusuf inventory what didn’t arrive. The list is short and long at the same time. “Tomorrow?” she asks.

“Tomorrow,” he says, with a shrug that holds both hope and its absence.

She walks home by alleys that cameras forget. In her flat, she locks the door and puts the drone footage on two encrypted drives: one for Elena, one for the day when telling the story requires more than memory. She texts the team:

Port closed. Small injuries, big frustration. We’ll route by land. Pray for peace and for one boy with a cut who laughed when I said ‘His.’

Mariam: Praying for that boy’s laugh to turn into a song.
Dmitri: Document. Flour tins work well.
Noam: Psalm 107: He guides them to a harbor of

safety.
Elena: Good work, Lina. Tomorrow we try again. Rest your courage.

Lina lies on her back on the floor and stares at the ceiling fan wobbling like a planet that needs balancing. She prays for the ship and the cranes and the boy and the masked man and her own uncooperative heart. Then she sleeps like someone who will get up when the phone buzzes and do it again.

10. Addis Ababa

“Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called sons of God.”
— Matthew 5:9 (NASB2020)

Yoni stares at the stuck convoy like it can be reasoned with. Two water trucks, a pickup loaded with chlorine tabs, a flatbed with latrine kits—all paused at a checkpoint that sprouted overnight like a mushroom after rain. The militia here wears mismatched uniforms and matching expressions: bored until they’re not.

“Paper,” says the young one with a scar that looks like a question mark.

“Paper,” Yoni echoes, and hands over the envelope stamped with Blue Nile Community Works. The boy frowns at the English, then at the Amharic, then at Yoni’s face. He hands it to an older man whose eyes are a ledger.

“Tax,” the older man says. “CBDC only.”

Yoni nods as if negotiating electricity rates instead of mercy. “We can send it. The network is slow.”

“The network is fast for those who matter,” the man says without heat. He taps the QR board with his knuckle.

Yoni breathes. He knows several true things at once: that paying marks a line he doesn’t want to cross; that not paying keeps cholera in the camps; that lines drawn without love are just pride. He glances at the women waiting under a tarpaulin—jerrycans at their

feet, babies on their hips, patience wearing thin the way rope does.

“Sir,” Yoni says gently in Amharic, “we’re taking water to families that will remember your kindness.”

The man’s mouth tightens. “Kindness doesn’t buy bullets.”

“Kindness buys peace,” Yoni says, and the sentence doesn’t sound like bargaining anymore; it sounds like truth. He risks it. “Let us pass today, for the sake of the children. If God sees that you showed mercy, He will pay you back better than money can.”

The older man looks at him as if he’s remembered something he hoped to forget. Yoni waits, not pushing. A breeze pushes instead, lifting dust, turning the tarpaulin into a sail that will go nowhere. The man sighs. “Two trucks,” he says. “Leave one.”

“We’ll send the third after sunset,” Yoni replies, already planning an alternate route that is rougher but quieter. “And we’ll leave three drums of chlorine for your men.”

The man nods once. The young soldier with the question-mark scar looks disappointed to miss excitement and relieved to miss guilt.

The little convoy rolls. Yoni sits in the cab beside Tesfaye, whose beard holds three different kinds of gray. “You spoke like a pastor,” Tesfaye says.

“I spoke like a man with a full bladder,” Yoni says, and they laugh enough to release the tension without pretending it wasn’t there.

At the camp, children appear like spring. The first truck's valve opens, and joy sounds like water hitting plastic. Mothers close their eyes in gratitude that looks like pain easing. Yoni kneels to show an older boy how to chlorinate properly—capfuls, not guesses. "You are in charge," he says. "Teach two others. If you mess up, ask. No shame."

The boy lifts his chin. He will not mess up.

Yoni's sat phone buzzes. He wipes his hands and checks the group thread.

Mariam: Generator up (borrowed part). Babies stable.
Lina: Port shut. Land routes tomorrow.
Dmitri: "Extremist" lists lengthen. Praying windows stay open.
Kerem: TrustScore tightening. Convoy threading needles.
Elena: Proud of wise courage everywhere.
Noam: Temple rehearsals advanced—tensions high.
Arash: Clinic pilots starting. Scan-first orders.

Yoni: Two trucks through, one held. Water flowing. Please pray for a checkpoint commander who remembered he was human for a minute.

They set latrine kits in a grid that turns chaos into dignity. A young mother asks if they can spare another bar of soap. Yoni gives two. Later, he'll cut a bar in half to make the numbers work. "How long will you stay?" she asks.

"As long as we can," he says, and she nods because that is the only honest answer anyone gives anymore.

On the drive back, they take the rougher track. It threads fields where boys with sticks pretend to be generals and goats pay no attention. The late sun makes everything gold, the kind of gold you can't put in a vault. Yoni prays out loud for a minute, stumbles, then prays again. Tesfaye says "*amen*" at exactly the right moment.

At the office, they inventory like monks counting beads: filters, pipe glue, tablets, bandages. Yoni writes an email that will never be sent today and maybe never: *If we raise the wellhead two handbreadths and add a gravel collar, flood season won't drown it.* He prints it for the file that exists for after electricity and for after someone needs to know how to do this without him.

In the evening, he walks to a small church where candles make brave circles of light. He wants to ask God to fix everything. He ends up asking God to keep him from avoiding people when they cry. An old woman pats his cheek like he's seven and tells him he's too thin. "Eat," she commands, and hands him bread and a verse: *Blessed are the peacemakers.* He eats the bread. He wears the verse like armor that doesn't clank.

Before sleep, he texts Amal: *Your anger turned into courage saves lives.*
She replies: *Your gentleness turns into roads.*
He smiles in the dark and wills himself to rest, because tomorrow starts early and the third truck still waits at a gate.

Act II: Opening of the Seals (Days 1 → ~300)

11. Seal One

"I looked, and behold, a white horse, and the one who sat on it had a bow; and a crown was given to him, and he went out conquering and to conquer."
— Revelation 6:2 (NASB2020)

The announcement doesn't drop; it unfurls. Brussels first—careful diction, flags in a neat row, a phrase about "coordinated frameworks for stability." Beijing echoes inside an hour with words about harmony and trust. The Global Council whispers begin in between and then someone stops whispering.

Across ten cities, the team watches the horse they can't see make footprints they can.

Jerusalem. Noam films a press conference where a Council liaison praises "unified identity" as the end of friction. The words land like balm on some ears and like sand in others. He keeps the lens steady and his jaw unclenched and whispers Psalm 2 under his breath like a counter-melody.

Istanbul. Kerem refreshes the TrustScore console and sees a new column: *Civic Reliability*. The back-end note calls it "pilot metric." The front-end reality calls it a choke point. He drafts a blog post and deletes it, and drafts another that tells more truth than his supervisor will like and slightly less than his conscience does. He hits publish and braces for a meeting.

Tehran. Arash walks through the waiting room of a pilot hospital. An old man with a hacking cough does not scan; the clerk shakes his head without looking

up. A young mother whose eyes speak pain, scans green, and weeps from relief and shame. Arash writes both sentences in his notebook and prays for the courage to become a sentence himself when required.

Khartoum. Amal guides the convoy down the farm track at dawn. A new checkpoint appears like a bad habit. This one lets them through after a phone call to a cousin's cousin. She hates that mercy requires such choreography. She also thanks God for choreography that ends in life.

Cairo. Mariam stands in a pharmacy queue under a sign that says *UPGRADE FOR ACCESS* and passes her place three times to mothers who keep apologizing and keep meaning it. The clerk mouths *sorry* like a prayer to a different god. Mariam answers with a real one.

Tripoli. Lina learns which alleys the pickups don't like and uses them until they do. She ferries a cooler that used to carry fish and now carries vials. She prays the cold holds and the courage too.

Moscow. Dmitri's dashboard flags a pastor's sermon as "harmful." He saves the audio off-grid and writes a caption for the approved feed that says nothing and everything: *Quiet people doing good in small rooms are not your enemies.*

Addis Ababa. Yoni trains three teenagers on latrine maintenance and pretends it's because he is efficient. Later, alone in the tool shed, he admits it's because he might be arrested someday, and they must know how to fix things without him.

Delhi. Arun stands outside the campus gate with a hand-lettered sign: *TUTORING: ENGLISH, LOGIC, GOSPEL. FREE.* He talks to seven students. Two stay long enough to ask why his eyes shine when he says the name of Jesus.

DC/NY. Elena watches the feeds, reads the fine print, and prays in sentences that avoid both panic and platitude. She buys a second battery pack for her sat phone and writes a message to all ten at once: *You are not alone. The Lord is not surprised. Keep your stories honest and your hearts soft.*

Across the team thread, someone types: *Is this the first seal?* No one answers with certainty. They move their hands and their feet and their prayers like men and women who know that naming a horse is not the same as outrunning it—or standing when it passes.

12. Seal Two (Istanbul)

"And another, a red horse, went out; and to him who sat on it, it was granted to take peace from the earth, and that people would kill one another; and a great sword was given to him."
— Revelation 6:4 (NASB2020)

Kerem wakes to sirens and a sky that looks bruised before sunrise. His phone is already full—the group thread jammed with fragments, the news app stuttering between official calm and shaky amateur feeds. A tanker listing in the straits, smoke lifting like a black finger. Two fast patrol boats—flags blurred by distance—trading real fire this time, not warnings. Rumors say drones. Rumors say mines. Rumors say *enough talk*.

By the time he reaches Anatolia Aid & Culture, the city is tighter. Ferries idle under bridges that suddenly remember they're strategic. Police tape and sandbags arrive where yesterday there were only pigeons. Murat is already barking logistics into two phones. "Curfew advisories by district," he says without looking up. Hospitals are calling for plasma and generators. The corridor is 'for certified goods only.'"

"Certified by whom?" Kerem asks, though he knows the answer.

Murat points at the new banner on the dashboard: *Security Condition Delta — TrustScore Prioritization Active*. "Get our convoy out before someone decides compassion is contraband."

At the warehouse, Ece has the crew loading the gurney kits and fuel filters, as if it were a choreography they hoped never to perform. Mustafa leans on the truck, jaw set. “They hit a tanker at dawn,” he says, voice flat. “Or the tanker hit something. The news argues. Fishermen don’t. They saw the splash.”

“Routes?” Kerem asks.

“Coastal road is a parade of uniforms,” Ece answers. “We take the hill streets and come down near the clinic. If they stop us, you do the talking.”

“I always do,” Kerem says, and tries a grin he doesn’t feel.

They roll under a sky that can’t decide between ash and ordinary morning. The first checkpoint is police and National Guard sharing cigarettes like cousins. “Papers,” the officer says, but his eyes are already searching for the red cross on the crates. Kerem keeps his voice even. “Medical resupply. District Hospital Two.” The officer hesitates. Someone coughs behind him in the way men cough when they would rather not be seen helping. “Go,” he says finally, and bangs the truck twice as if to cover the mercy with noise.

The second checkpoint is not cousins. Black helmets. Hard eyes. One sergeant taps the tablet, frowns. “Entity reliability,” he says, as if reading a horoscope. “You’ve been *critical of messaging*.”

“We’ve been critical of babies not breathing,” Kerem answers, softer than his temper wants.

The sergeant studies him a beat too long. A flash—distant, in the east—catches in all their pupils at once.

Half a second later, the sound arrives, a long, ugly shudder of air. Someone's ammo dump? A warehouse? A rumor becomes a fact you can smell, a low chemical thread in the wind.

"Go," the sergeant mutters, suddenly tired. "Don't linger on the way back."

They don't. As they turn downhill, a volley of pops ladders up the block—small arms, then one uncomfortably large thump. A scooter darts past with a bloodied man hanging on behind the driver, eyes glassy, shirt stuck to his side. Mustafa swears and brakes hard. "In," Kerem says, and they haul the man onto the tarp. The driver stammers the story in spills of Turkish and fear: stray fire, wrong corner, wrong morning.

The clinic looks like a hive that forgot to be civilized. A nurse waves them into the rear bay with both arms. Inside, everything is triage and heat and the metallic air of adrenaline. Kerem and Ece unload to a rhythm older than policy—gurney, plasma, filters, and the small generator that keeps the cold chain alive so insulin is more than a word.

"Can you hold the line?" Ece asks the charge nurse, a woman with shoulders of iron and eyes full of Monday. "If the corridor closes?"

"We held lines before corridors," she snaps, then softens. "Thank you. Eat something." She points at a tray of tea and sad crackers like a sacrament. Ece obeys; Kerem pretends to and gets caught; he obeys too.

His sat phone buzzes through the muffled chaos.

Kerem: Shots fired in straits—real hits. City on edge. Checkpoints twitchy. Delivered plasma, filters, and small gen. Casualties passing us to the ER.
Noam: Jerusalem tightens with it. Praying Psalm 46 over your waters.
Mariam: Cairo on alert; hospital securing entrances. We're stocked because of you.
Elena: Seal Two. Choose shipments over statements today. Document off-grid; do not post. If you must decide in a doorway, pick the patient.

On the way back, the route they took is gone—black helmets, a troop carrier, a line of civilians pressed to a wall with hands showing open. Mustafa takes a side street that feels like a lie and becomes mercy. Two blocks over, a knot of men argues with their phones instead of fists. For three breaths, this neighborhood chooses to be rational.

At the warehouse, they repack—splints, saline, more gauze than Kerem thought the city possessed. The second convoy is a smaller truck and an old van that loathes hills but loves obedience. "Curfew at dusk," Murat warns. "Anyone moving after dark better have a halo or paperwork that looks like one."

"Where next?" Ece asks.

Kerem checks the requests—two neighborhood clinics, one shelter with windows taped in Xs as if that will stop shrapnel from making arguments. "We start with the shelter. They're closest to the water."

They reach it just as another siren unfurls. People stream inside like they practiced. A grandmother insists on bringing her potted basil. Kerem carries it down the steps while Ece shepherds a boy clutching a cat that does not appreciate the metaphors. In the stairwell, a concussive *whump* makes everyone flinch. Dust patters from the light fixtures like coarse rain.

“Gas line?” someone whispers.

“Echo,” someone else lies. Nobody believes anybody, and they all keep moving.

Down in the room that was designed to be a classroom for emergencies and became an emergency for classrooms, Kerem thinks he might finally vomit. He doesn’t. He hands out water instead and pretends to the basil that this is fine.

Another burst of messages:

Arash: Tehran units mobilizing to “protect infrastructure.” Buses stopped. Roads clog.
Dmitri: Moscow says incident contained; ambulances say otherwise. We’re praying with windows open.
Yoni: Addis camp hears blasts on the radio. Shade tunnels are up. Kids jump at every siren.
Amal: Khartoum is calmer today, oddly. We move while the world looks away.
Lina: Tripoli port seals “for security.” We switch to feet.
Elena: All—sleep in armor (Eph 6). Kerem, good triage. Home before curfew.

Home before curfew is a wish and then a plan. On the last leg, a column of armored vehicles rattles past, antennas lashing like angry reeds. A kid with a brick in his hand flinches at the size of them and drops it. The brick breaks into three less certain stones. Kerem thanks God for weak wrists.

At the bridge, he stops and watches the water pretend indifference. Smoke still scrapes the sky way out where the sea learns to be straits. He texts Elena privately: *How do I keep from hating everyone with a uniform today?*

Her reply takes a minute that feels longer. Bless one by name. Then two. Pray for a security officer. Pray for a black-helmet sergeant. Pray for the kid who dropped the brick. You are not allowed to hate your mission field.

He breathes. He prays. He almost means it.

Night comes with a curfew voice looped from a speaker, as if the city has to say “stay home” ten times to believe it. Kerem and Ece file their off-grid records, tape labels to boxes they will move at dawn if the roads stand, and leave a bag of groceries on the widow’s door because war doesn’t cancel kindness.

From the roof, he watches a patrol boat cut a V across black water toward the place where morning changed shape. Drones buzz somewhere nobody admits. A thin flock of birds chooses a different direction.

On the thread, he writes one more line before sleep: *Red horse is riding. Lord, make our hands steady, our words few, our mercy loud.*

13. Seal Three (Cairo / Addis)

“I looked, and behold, a black horse; and the one who sat on it had a pair of scales in his hand. And I heard something like a voice… saying, ‘A quart of wheat for a denarius, and three quarts of barley for a denarius; and do not damage the oil and the wine.’”
— Revelation 6:5–6 (NASB2020)

Cairo. The baker sets a brass scale on the counter like an altar. Flour dust floats in light that has no patience. A soldier stands by the door with a tablet and a green check mark that behaves like God and isn’t.

“Half loaves,” the baker says. “Price adjusted.”

“Adjusted how?” asks a woman with twins in a sling.

“Up,” he answers gently, and cuts.

Mariam waits her turn with a bundle of clinic ration cards and a letter from the matron with the authority of truth. The soldier scans the QR on the letter, frowns at the screen that doesn’t know what to do with mercy, and shrugs like a man who remembered his mother today. “Ten loaves,” he says. “For the ward.”

“Eleven,” Mariam says, because babies are odd numbers sometimes.

He thinks, then nods. “Eleven.”

Outside, a line wobbles down the block. A man mutters about hoarders; a woman answers about hunger. Mariam divides the loaves into two sacks and gives one to a grandmother whose eyes are tired of asking. “For later,” Mariam says. “God sees.”

At the hospital pharmacy, the new sign has grown a cousin: *NO SUBSIDY WITHOUT UPGRADE*. The pharmacist keeps his hands moving and his conscience intact, the only way he can: he rings up what the system allows; he slides samples across the counter in a bag that looks like trash and isn't. Mariam pretends not to see; she says thank you like a psalm.

In the NICU, the rhythm is breath, beep, and prayer. A mother asks if God cares about scales. "He does," Mariam says, and thinks of a different pair of scales in a different hand and prays for the mercy that overrides arithmetic.

Addis Ababa. Yoni bargains for chlorine like it's jewelry. The merchant weighs the bucket on a hanging scale and tuts. "Heavy. Price is heavy too."

"Price is kind for children," Yoni says, and waits long enough for the sentence to work. It works halfway.

They settle on a number that will make the ledger ache and the wells safer. On the road back to the camp, he and Tesfaye pass a kiosk where a new "community wallet" pilot promises *FAIR PRICES* with a smiley icon. A woman with a baby at her breast asks what fair means when the smile costs a signature.

"It means some officials eat oil and wine while we weigh barley," Tesfaye mutters.

At the camp, Yoni runs a training: *how to fix a broken handle with wire, how to keep soap dry so it lasts longer, how to calculate chlorine by capful even*

when the cap goes missing. He turns scarcity into a lesson without pretending scarcity is holy.

His sat phone buzzes.

Mariam: Half-loaves by weight. Hospital rationed. Lord, see the scales.
Yoni: He sees. Chlorine in, price painful. Wells holding. Praying.

Before dusk, a militia truck trundles past the checkpoint, its men in the back laughing as if money calms nerves. One of them tosses a foil packet into the dust: imported olive oil. The camp stares at the sky like it might explain itself. Yoni kneels to fix a pump seal and chooses the obedience in front of him: *Blessed are the peacemakers*, even when the price board says otherwise.

That night, Mariam and Yoni end up in the same thread with Elena and Noam. Elena posts Psalm 37: *Better is the little of the righteous*; Noam adds, *Do not fret because of evildoers*. Mariam, who is tired of fretting, types *Amen* and means it like bread.

14. Seal Four (Khartoum)

“I looked, and behold, an ashen horse; and the one who sat on it had the name Death; and Hades was following with him… and authority was given to them over a fourth of the earth, to kill with sword, and famine, and plague, and by the wild animals of the earth.”
— Revelation 6:8 (NASB2020)

The ward smells like bleach and endings. Amal ties on a mask. The cots line the corridor because the rooms ran out of space yesterday. On the wall, someone taped a timetable that pretends this is a school, and the bell will ring to send people home.

“ORS first,” she tells the trainees. “Small sips. Watch for sunken eyes. Pinch the skin; if it stays pinched, call me.”

They move. A boy with a bracelet made from a soda can tab grips her finger with a strength that surprises both of them. A grandmother prays in a whisper that refuses to be quiet. A young man stares at the ceiling and chooses to live or not in a place no one can see.

Outside, gunfire pops like someone making popcorn badly. Isaac sticks his head in the doorway. “Farm track blocked. Roundabout taxed. Bridge—uncertain.”

“Uncertain how?”

“In the sense that nothing is certain.”

She exhales through her teeth. “We need salts, antibiotics, and IV tubing. The cholera ward grew two wings overnight.”

“We can buy from the private warehouse if we scan.”

“We won’t.”

He nods once. “We won’t.”

She drafts two lists: one for what they will ask their friends across borders to send; one for what they will try to find from neighbors who keep things under beds because the last twenty years taught them to. She sends the cross-border list to Yoni, Kerem, and Elena with a note: *If you can’t, I will still love you. If you can, I will cry the good kind.*

In the afternoon, a militia pickup rattles into the courtyard. Men hop out with rifles that look second-hand and eyes that look first in line. Amal squares her shoulders and greets them like guests at a wedding.

“We hear you treat without scanning,” the leader says.

“We treat,” she answers.

He looks past her at the cots and the eyes and the empty IV bags. He lowers his voice. “My nephew is inside.”

“Then bring him water,” she says. “And leave the gun at the door.”

He does the second thing slowly and the first thing fast. When he returns, his face remembers his face. He stands by his nephew and pours careful sips like a man who learned tenderness in an hour.

Amal thinks of the pale horse and of the God who is not riding it. She thinks of Moses holding up his arms and of people holding up Moses. She texts the team:

Amal: Cholera wave. Need tubing, salts, antibiotics. Farm track closed. Bridge uncertain. God constant.

Lina: Routing by land if customs lets us breathe. Pray.
Mariam: Cairo scrounging. Will send what I can.
Elena: Amal, pick two people to give you breaks. Sleep two hours. Non-negotiable.
Noam: Praying Psalm 91 over your ward.

At dusk, a woman with henna-stained hands refuses to leave her daughter's cot. Amal sits beside her and doesn't ask her to. The woman tells a story about a wedding where the cake fell and everyone laughed and no one cared because the bride and groom were too in love to notice. Amal laughs because the woman wants her to and because the sound keeps the room from being only about death.

Night. Generators thrum and falter and catch. Amal dozes upright for twenty minutes and wakes to the sound of rain that is not rain—bucket water sluicing the corridor. The boy with the soda-tab bracelet sleeps. The nephew drinks again. A nurse counts pints like sparrows; God numbers hairs.

Just before dawn, the bridge rumor returns with feet. "It's open," Isaac says, breathless. "For now."

"Then we go," Amal says, and wills the sun to hurry. She writes a list on her arm in marker because paper wanders and arms don't.

When the convoy pulls out, she rides standing again, one hand on the cab, one on the tarp. The roundabout stares at them like a test they already studied for. The

men with scarves are new and old at once. Amal lifts her chin. The leader—no, a boy pretending—waves them through without looking up from his phone. She thanks God for phones that distract tyrants and for the fact that gratitude still occurs to her head at all.

They cross. On the far side, a stray dog runs alongside the truck for a hundred meters like he wants to help. Amal grins at him like he did.

Back at the ward, she washes her hands until the skin protests and then keeps washing. She hums a line of a hymn she can't finish, and God finishes it for her. The pale horse moves on. Amal keeps standing.

15. DC/NY Hub (Elena)

"Let us hold firmly to the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful; and let us consider how to encourage one another in love and good deeds… not abandoning our own meeting together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another; and all the more as you see the day drawing near."
— Hebrews 10:23–25 (NASB2020)

Elena keeps three clocks: Jerusalem, Beijing, and Khartoum. The fourth—her own—she ignores. Her apartment has turned into a command post with good coffee: satellite phones charging like a row of obedient soldiers; batteries labeled with dates like a pantry; a world map pocked with pins and paper tabs that say things like *GEN PART – EGY?* and *ALT ROUTE VIA ERZ.*

She starts the day with a check-in liturgy: read Scripture out loud (today Hebrews 10), pray each name until it is a person again and not a dot on a map, craft the message that will land as courage and not as pressure.

Beloved team: hold fast. Practical notes—
• Sat-check windows: top of every third hour, 10-min tolerance.
• If blackouts extend >24h, switch to low-bandwidth burst mode.
• Document off-grid; transmit when safe.
• Health: sleep in shifts; name your backups; eat real food.

• Ethics: when in doubt, choose people over posts. “He who promised is faithful.”

She sends individual notes too.

To Mariam: Three to carry with you—text their names each morning.

To Yoni: Teach one more teenager today.

To Kerem: Thank Ece twice.

To Dmitri: Save the sermon audio; God honors flour tins.

To Amal: Two hours of sleep today, even if you hate me for it.

To Lina: Keep your profile low; your courage is loud without cameras.

To Arash: One step—clinic watch, then names.

To Arun: Window day is coming. The Spirit will make it obvious.

To Noam: Hydrate; send a thirty-second clip before sundown. Stones still cry out.

She meets with a quiet group in a church basement in Queens—aid workers, a former diplomat, a pastor with kind eyes. They draw routes on a whiteboard and erase them as borders move in ink you can’t see. They decide to ship a generator part in a crate labeled *Liturgical Supplies* because sometimes you ask men to choose between sacrilege and mercy, and they accidentally pick mercy. Elena doesn’t like the trick but likes the babies breathing.

On the subway home, an ad for the Global Council's *Unified Identity* smiles at her with sanitized teeth. A line of small print offers *compassionate access*. She prays the Council meets real compassion and doesn't know what to do with it.

Her sat phone trembles with life.

Amal: Bridge open. Supplies run. Ward holding.
Mariam: Loaves by weight; God by grace.
Yoni: Chlorine in, boys trained.
Kerem: Straits tense; shipments threading.
Lina: Port shut; land route tomorrow.
Dmitri: "Extremist" lists expanding; flour tin full.
Arash: Clinic pilot watching. Names coming.
Arun: Gate still red; shade still church.
Noam: Mount rehearsals sharpen. Tension like flint.

Elena copies their lines into a document labeled *Daily Stones*. She adds dates and three words beside each: *Mercy, Wisdom, Courage*, little checkboxes she will never show them, but that keep her asking God for specific things.

In the evening, she stands at her window and looks at a city that thinks it is the center of the world and sometimes is and sometimes isn't. She prays for leaders she will never meet and for boys at checkpoints she will also never meet and for the two Witnesses Noam hasn't seen yet but will.

An alert pings from a monitoring feed—EU and PRC frameworks to merge "for stability and trust." She files it under *White Horse* with the date and the time and a

verse she will not share because Scripture should not be ammunition unless God says so.

Before bed, she writes one more message to all ten:

If the day tightens and you can't find words, send a single dot. I'll pray until you can speak again. If you have to choose between telling the truth and staying safe, ask the Lord which obedience He is asking for in that hour. We will not all have the same answer every day. He will be faithful to each of you. I love you. Hold fast.

Dots come back from three countries within a minute. Then words. Then the quiet that means sleep in time zones she can't control. Elena sits on the floor between the map and the chargers and thanks God that the day is His—this one, and the next, and the one when the sky splits and the horses stop moving.

16. Beijing (House-Church Raid)

“Behold, I am sending you out as sheep in the midst of wolves; so be as shrewd as serpents and as innocent as doves.”
— Matthew 10:16 (NASB2020)

Jia rehearses the exits in her head like scales: front stair, back stair, across the roof to the next building, down the cable tray to the courtyard where the laundry lines make a forest. She sets the kettle to murmur, lays out cups, and hides the hymn sheets inside an old atlas. The room smells like tea and pencil shavings and the rubber band that holds the atlas shut.

Tonight the church is small on purpose—eight people, two new, one neighbor who “just wants to listen” and means it. Auntie Mei prays short and bright, like a match you cup against the wind. Chen reads a paragraph from John and stumbles and laughs, then doesn’t stumble on the next one. Jia sings the low harmony because the ceiling is low and harmony knows how to duck.

Halfway through the second hymn, the door camera pings. A single vibration. **Unknown face.** Jia glances at Auntie Mei. The elder nods once: continue. The unknown face passes. The kettle hisses. They keep singing.

Then the stairwell fills with feet.

No knock. Just fists, then a boot. The chain snags and bounces; the door judders in its frame. The neighbor freezes. Chen’s eyes go to the back window like a sparrow deciding if glass is sky.

“Scatter,” Auntie Mei says, voice so calm the word doesn’t sound like fear. “Pairs. No one alone.”

The fist at the door becomes a crowbar. Wood complains. Jia lifts the atlas, slides the hymn sheets behind the false sill, and flips the latch on the window. The first shout from the hall is rehearsed and bored: “Open—inspection.”

Auntie Mei opens. “Coming,” she says, as if to a guest who’s early. She buys them seven seconds with that voice. Seven seconds is a good long time if you have practiced it.

Jia and Chen slip into the hall and move sideways like a rumor. The back stair smells like cabbage and dust and shoes that haven’t forgiven their owners. A door opens below them; a face looks up; a hand beckons. They hold their breath. Pass. At the next landing, a man with a tool belt steps out, blocks the view from above for half a heartbeat, says, “Pipe leak,” loudly enough for someone to believe him. Jia whispers “thank you” to a God who drafts plumbers into miracles.

They emerge into the night behind the building. A drone buzzes low, searching like a hornet that forgot its anger and kept the habit. Chen’s hand trembles; Jia squeezes it once, hard, then lets go so it doesn’t look like they belong together. They walk like people who know where they’re going.

Her sat phone vibrates twice—low pattern. *Sweep expanding: block cordon*. She and Chen cut through a noodle shop that serves the alley and the alley only. The cook nods without looking up, flips dumplings like prayers, steam rising like incense. Out the other door, then left, then under the plane tree. She hears the hymn in her head, where it keeps singing even when mouths don’t.

They reach the safe flat—a room above a copy shop that keeps strange hours and stranger loyalties. Jia knocks the pattern. The door opens to a young woman with ink on her hands and a baby on her hip. Inside, three others breathe like they're remembering how.

"Auntie?" Jia asks.

The young woman shakes her head, face set. "Taken," she says. "They filled three vans."

Jia sits before her knees stop working. Chen leans against the wall and stares at the floor until his eyes find Psalm words someone chalked under the skirting board: *The angel of the Lord encamps around those who fear Him.* He touches the chalk with his fingertip like a man checking a pulse.

Jia texts the team:

Jia: *Raid. Auntie Mei taken. Half of us got out. Hiding place safe for now. Pray.*

Noam: *Praying Psalm 34. I'm so sorry.*
Amal: *God confound their plans. Give you roads.*
Elena: *Jia, breathe. Two actions: list who's missing; secure Bibles; sleep in shifts. I'm here.*
Arun: *Acts 12: chains on the floor in Jesus' name.*

They inventory the missing: Auntie Mei; two men who were at the front of the room; the neighbor, who hadn't decided yet whether faith was his and now is deciding in a van he didn't ask for. Jia moves through the motions—hide, count, plan—while her heart keeps touching one note: *Mei, Mei, Mei.*

Near dawn, a message comes through a friend of a friend: *Detained at District Station 3. No charges yet.* Jia prays she will be allowed to bring food. She prays for favor, for the slow ideas in officials' heads to speed up in the direction of mercy, for the hallways in that station to remember footsteps of deliverance.

She takes her first sleep on the floor by the copy machine that purrs like a cat. In her half-dream, she is singing. The song lifts and lifts, then stops at a ceiling she cannot see. She keeps singing anyway, quietly, for an audience of One and for an elder who taught her to.

When she wakes, the ink on the young woman's hands has become Scripture on small slips—verses meant to fit in shoes and pockets, places guards don't check. Jia writes a line of her own: *Love is stronger than chains*. She is not sure where that is in the Bible exactly. She is sure it is true.

17. Tehran (Laying Roads)

“Your ears will hear a word behind you, ‘This is the way, walk in it,’ whenever you turn to the right or to the left.”
— Isaiah 30:21 (NASB2020)

Arash stands outside the pilot clinic and learns the choreography of refusal. The clerk’s eyes go dead at the word “upgrade,” then alive again when someone slides a note with a number on it. A mother turns away without arguing because she has argued enough this week, and the cough is heavier now. An old man says he will come back tomorrow and means *never*.

He writes names when he can: first name, neighborhood, symptom shorthand, a symbol only he understands for *won’t scan*. He knows this is a list worth going to prison for; he writes it anyway. He does not carry the list in his pocket. He carries it in three places: the bakery back room (under flour), the radio shop (inside a dead radio), and the map in his head (ring roads, alleys, time of day when blue shutters are up).

At noon, he meets Sadaf at a tea stand where the sugar cubes taste like a childhood birthday. “You have the look of a man who bought a shovel,” she says.

“I have the look of a man who found a road,” he answers. “Hossein says when we call, we give a road, not a speech.”

She sips. “When do you call?”

“When the next layer drops,” he says. “Transport access. Then food.”

“Soon,” she says, and it is not a question.

That night, he walks the first leg of a route to the south—quiet alleys that refuse to be on maps, a gap in a fence that looks like laziness and is a gift, a stand of scrub that hides a car if the car has the humility to be hidden. He caches water and dates in a bush that owes him nothing. He prays over the bush anyway, because Jonah’s plant taught him God listens even when you’re ridiculous.

Back home, he studies satellite images on a laptop that isn’t connected to anything that breathes. He notes a construction site that will become a problem in two months. He draws a detour with a pencil, then folds the corner nearest the turn, a childish ritual that makes him laugh at himself and also calms him.

The next morning, the pilot expands as predicted. A sign at the bus depot: *UPGRADE FOR TRANSIT*. A grandmother with a basket stands at the curb and stares at the sign as if it were impolite. Arash guides her to a different stop two blocks over, where the driver still takes cash because he likes being useful. The driver nods at Arash like a man who won’t say thank you in front of signs.

His sat phone buzzes.

Arash: Transport now tied to upgrade. Building routes. Three names today—no scan, urgent care.
Mariam: Send one to me if they can get to the border. We’ll find beds.

Kerem: Turkey door cracked. East corridors at night only.
Elena: Good work. Write what you cannot carry; carry what you cannot write.

At dusk, Arash goes to the bakery. Hossein sits with a radio that pretends to be broken and isn't. Hossein nods in greeting. "One thing," he says. "Your Institute is hosting a panel on 'Disinformation Harm' next week. You will not speak, but your face will be there. Good."

"Good how?"

"You look like a scholar. Scholars are boring to men who want excitement. Be boring. Meanwhile, we move people."

Arash laughs. "I can be boring."

"God can use boring," Hossein says, and tears his bread in half like communion.

On the way home, Arash stops at the clinic again. The same clerk. The same dead eyes. A different mother, this one fierce. She argues and wins a voucher that will not scan without the upgrade. Her face breaks anyway when the doctor looks at her child with the attention that says *you matter*. Arash watches that look and remembers why he is doing any of this: because attention given in love is a road too.

He texts the team a single line: *Roads laid. Waiting for the word behind me.*
Noam answers with Psalm 25: *Make me know Your ways, O Lord.*

Arash pockets the verse like a compass and goes to sleep with his shoes by the bed.

18. Jerusalem (Sacrifices Resume)

“And he will make a firm covenant with the many for one week, but in the middle of the week he will put a stop to sacrifice and grain offering…”
— Daniel 9:27 (NASB2020)

The day arrives dressed like a festival and guarded like a war. Noam threads the Trust office badge through the gate and feels the press of bodies and history. The temporary altar gleams under a sky that seems smaller than usual, like the city has grown taller with expectation.

Police funnels hum. Metal detectors chirp like small birds. Journalists angle for angles. Pilgrims cry and do not apologize. Protesters chant in two directions at once. Above it all, the low note the thin man spoke of the other day—the pressure in the stone, the hum in the air—has deepened into something like a drum under the city.

Avner checks batteries, lenses, his temper. “We shoot ceremony,” he reminds Noam. “No editorializing. Truth in images.”

“Images are opinion,” Noam says, but softly. He sets his frame: linen on steps, an old man’s hands steady, a boy’s hands shaking, a lamb that does not know where it is going but senses the crowd anyway. He records the *shofar* note and the murmur that follows it: prayer, protest, awe, fear, a hundred kinds of breath.

A Council liaison gives remarks to the foreign press—words about cultural rights and security, and the

beauty of heritage under a unified digital framework. Noam's camera doesn't care about the words; it cares about the way the liaison's eyes flick to the barricades when a chant grows. Across the plaza, a counter-protest yells Scripture back at Scripture. A woman faints. Two others catch her before she hits stone.

The first sacrifice proceeds. The instructor's voice threads through the heat. The knife gleams. The lamb bleats once and then not. Noam's hands do not shake. His heart does, and he films anyway, because truth is not less true because it shakes you. He finds the faces—the ones lifted in joy, the ones tight with dread, the ones that haven't decided yet what this means and are a little angry that someone made them decide today.

When the smoke rises, the plaza tips from charged to volatile. A group surges; police flex; a bottle arcs and shatters; a chant turns into a push and then into something with elbows. Avner swears softly. "Back," he says. "We're not heroes."

"We're witnesses," Noam answers, and keeps his lens trained on the altar for three seconds more than is safe, because he knows future him will need those three seconds to tell the truth.

A hand grabs his shoulder. David, his pastor, appears like a psalm in a storm. "Move," David says, not unkind. They pivot with the flow, get to the lee of a barrier, wait while a clot of men argue each other toward calm. Noam breathes through his mouth and tastes copper and incense and the unmistakable flavor of zeal.

His sat phone buzzes like a trapped bee. He glances: **Elena:** *Clip when safe. Water. Out routes?* He thumbs back: *North stair open. South blocked. Sending 30 sec now.* He sends a cut—smoke rising, linen hands, a boy's eyes wide, a drone shadow crossing stone.

When they finally withdraw into the narrow street, Avner leans on the wall, sweat bright on his temple. "We got it," he says, half triumph, half lament.

"We got something," Noam answers. "What it is… we'll find out."

David puts a hand on Noam's head like he's still the youth he once pastored. "Be steady," he says. "And be ready. Today is a beginning."

They walk past a newsstand where the headline writers have been busy: *UNITY THROUGH HERITAGE; PROVOCATION ON THE MOUNT; GLOBAL COUNCIL PRAISES ORDER; PRAY FOR PEACE*. Noam takes photos of the span because the truth is big enough to hold contradictions without lying.

Back at the Trust office, he cuts a second clip: only hands—blessing, guiding, steadying, shaking. He labels it *Hands, Day One*. He adds a still of smoke rising against the ancient wall and another of a woman's face wet with tears she can't classify. He sends it to Elena, to the archive, and to the folder named *Stones Crying Out*. He doesn't change the folder name.

Evening. He meets David again, this time in the half-dark of a small room where the church prays. The prayers are not political and yet ache with politics anyway. Noam reads Psalm 122 out loud, voice catching on *pray for the peace of Jerusalem* as if it were written this morning.

On the way home, two men in suits watch him watch the stones. One taps a note on a tablet. The other pretends to enjoy the view. Noam walks on, neither fast nor slow. His phone buzzes.

Noam: Sacrifices resumed. Smoke rose. Tension high. We filmed with clean hands and shaking hearts.
Arun: Standing with you from the gate.
Jia: Praying Psalm 122 with you. Auntie still held.
Amal: God keep your feet from slipping.
Elena: Well done. Hydrate. Sleep with your shoes close.

He does. He dreams of smoke and water and of a low note that is now a drum, and of a voice he hasn't heard yet that will tell a city to breathe, and of stones that remember everything and are starting to speak.

19. Delhi (Checkpoint Eyes)

"So then, those who suffer according to the will of God are to entrust their souls to a faithful Creator in doing what is right."
— 1 Peter 4:19 (NASB2020)

Arun stands at the campus gate and watches the new cameras learn faces. They pivot like curious birds, then hold still like judges. The crowd has the feel of a storm about to choose its direction. Posters bloom and wrinkle in the same hour: *EDUCATION, NOT INDICATORS; UNIFIED ID = EQUAL ACCESS; MY WALLET, MY WILL.*

He holds his sign—*TUTORING: ENGLISH, LOGIC, GOSPEL. FREE.*—and smiles at anyone who will meet his eyes. Two students stop. "They'll sweep soon," one warns. "Desk Four will 'upgrade' you by force if you want to graduate."

"I want to obey God more than graduate," Arun says, gently. "And I love you enough to say that out loud."

A chant lifts and fractures. Police lines tighten. The loudspeaker uses words like *safety* and *order* with a voice that sounds like it has never held a baby. Pastor Mathew arrives without ceremony, just a hand on Arun's shoulder. "Today's courage?" he asks.

"Stand until we should kneel," Arun says.

"Good." Mathew's eyes crinkle. "And when the hour comes, we don't kneel to men."

The sweep begins. Desk Four agents—plainclothes with tablets—fan out to "assist." A student cries when

his yellow turns green, and everyone cheers because now he can register for classes. Another cries when her green turns red because of a post her cousin made, and everyone looks away because shame is contagious in crowds.

A deputy registrar spots Arun's sign. "You." He points like a teacher calling on a daydreamer. "You promote unauthorized instruction."

"I promote truth," Arun says, still gentle.

"Truth is what we accredit."

"Truth is a Person," Arun says, and hands the registrar a bottle of water, because the man's lips are cracked and it's 38°C, and love sees that even when it's irritated.

The man blinks, drinks, and remembers he has a throat. "Remove the sign."

"I can't," Arun says. "It's in my hands."

Two officers move forward like a script. Mathew steps between without posturing, palms open. "He is a volunteer, not a threat. This crowd will settle if you let it save face."

The officers hesitate. The desk agent doesn't. He reaches for the sign; the cardboard tears; the pole breaks with a sound too loud for paper. Phones lift. The story chooses a direction. Arun lifts his voice, not a shout, not a whisper—just enough.

"Friends," he calls, "don't trade your souls for convenience."

A shove from the side folds him. He doesn't see the hand. He tastes iron. The crowd surges, then stumbles back from itself. Mathew's arms cinch him upright. "Smile," the pastor murmurs, absurd and exactly right. Arun does, blood at the corner of his mouth like an unhelpful illustration.

A student shoves a scarf into his hand. "Here. For the picture you didn't want." She wraps it around the broken pole. A makeshift banner now says nothing and everything.

Sirens rise, then peel away. Someone somewhere decided to claim de-escalation. The lines slacken. Desk Four retreats to its desk. The cameras keep learning faces.

Mathew tucks Arun into the shade of a banyan tree. "We will not be foolish to make our point," he says, cleaning the cut with water. "When the point must be made, the Lord will make it."

Arun nods, dizzy. "I want to be faithful, not famous."

"Then you are safe," Mathew says. "Fame is a horse that breaks the men who try to ride it. Faithfulness is a yoke that fits."

Arun's sat phone vibrates.

Arun: Campus sweep. Sign torn. Small bruise, large resolve. Wallet pressure mounting.
Jia: Praying. Auntie Mei detained, no charge yet. Holding fast.
Kerem: If they shove again, we'll see it from here. Keep your windows ready.
Elena: Arun, ice and rest. And three calm

conversations today—no speeches. The Spirit uses both.

He spends the afternoon doing exactly that: tea with two students and one security guard who asks, off-script, if God notices men who enforce policies they don't believe in. "He does," Arun says. "And He forgives men who ask."

By dusk, the gate has perfected its smile. Arun walks home with the broken pole under his arm like a question mark waiting for God's answer.

20. Moscow (Vanishing Point)

"Do not fear those who kill the body but are unable to kill the soul; but rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell."
— Matthew 10:28 (NASB2020)

Dmitri's contact, the journalist who used to be loud and now isn't, misses a meeting for the first time in nine years. The park's perimeter path feels longer without a conversation to measure it. The bench where they trade facts has gum hardened to stone under the slat; Dmitri runs his thumb over it and pretends he's just fidgeting.

He sends the agreed signal—two photos of pigeons, twenty minutes apart. No reply. He doesn't send a third photo because patterns betray. He walks the loop twice, then goes home by the longer route, face neutral, back teeth aching from not clenching.

The office is a smooth lie today. Galina praises a thread that "responsibly contextualizes extremist designations." The dashboard's filter has new red words: *martyr, witness, deliverance*. Dmitri changes *martyr* to *regrettable casualty* in a published brief and wants to light the server on fire for making him do it. He saves the original paragraph off-grid.

At lunch, he gets the message he dreaded: a blank from an unknown number, then a single period. Their code for *taken, location unknown*. He closes his eyes to keep his face from collapsing. He opens them because men who look like grief become suspects.

He walks to Babushka Irina's flat because flour tins are better at holding pain than walls. She sets tea without asking. He tells her the period. She crosses herself and then takes his hand like he's seven again. "We will pray with windows open," she says, a stubborn echo of an old story.

"Windows make lists," he says.

"So does love," she answers, and opens the window anyway. The cold comes in like an honest guest. They pray small sentences, then silence. He does not ask God to free his friend, though he wants to; he asks God to keep his friend's soul unbroken. The bigger prayer follows on its own.

Back at Volkova, two men wait by his desk in plain coats that think they are invisible. "Mr. Sokolov," the taller one says. "A few questions."

"Of course," Dmitri says, voice even. He texts Elena with his thigh against the desk to hide the movement: *Visitors. Period earlier. Pray.* Her reply a minute later: *Lion-hearted; serpent-wise. Answer what you must; ask for counsel when you can.*

The questions are practiced: contacts, communications, religious meetings. Dmitri answers in honest half-sentences. He asks for counsel three times—"our legal team prefers I limit speculation," "my editor should be present," "I'd rather not misremember a date"—and discovers that serpents can be polite.

"Do you consider yourself religious?" the shorter one asks.

“I consider myself accountable,” Dmitri says.

“To whom?”

“To God,” he says first. Then, with the flat corporate tone he hates but chooses, “and to company policy.”

The men write nothing down because writing is for the poor. They stand. “We’ll be in touch.” The taller one glances at Dmitri’s bookshelf—Chekhov, Solzhenitsyn, a New Testament with a cracked spine—and touches nothing.

After they leave, Dmitri opens a document named *Light* and types: *Truth is patient. Lies hurry.* He prints it, tucks it with the sermon audio in Irina’s flour tin, and replaces the lid like a man resealing hope.

Evening. Snow begins without asking permission. Dmitri walks the bench route again. A boy tosses bread; pigeons take it with more gratitude than he feels capable of. He thinks of his friend in a room without windows. He prays the Lord will show up in that room the way He has a habit of doing in stories older than Russia and as current as this minute.

His sat phone buzzes.

Dmitri: Contact taken. Questioned at work, released. Saving what I can. Praying with windows open.
Noam: The Lord is your shade on your right hand.
Mariam: We’re holding you, brother. Flour tins here too.
Elena: You are not alone. If you must choose, choose people over posts.
Kerem: If you need a door one night, say the word.

Dmitri pockets the phone and walks home with his head up. Fear is efficient; faith is slow and thorough. He chooses the thorough thing and unlocks his door with hands that remember how.

Act III: Trumpets Loom (Days ~300 → 1,259)

21. Trumpet One (Ash and Amber)

“The first sounded, and there came hail and fire, mixed with blood, and it was hurled to the earth; and a third of the earth was burned up, and a third of the trees were burned up, and all the green grass was burned up.”
— Revelation 8:7 (NASB2020)

The news doesn’t agree on names—*derecho*, firestorm, polar surge, red lightning. The feeds do agree on pictures: forests going to sky in a single breath, hailstones that look like fists shattering glass, rivers running rust after a dust wall kisses rain. Commentary fills the gaps the way smoke fills lungs.

Addis Ababa. Yoni smells the fire before he sees the plume over the highlands. Smoke presses the camp like a hand. He and Tesfaye rig extra cloth filters and make a shade tunnel to the water point so children don’t stand in the sun when the air is trying to be fire. A boy asks if God can breathe smoke. “He can,” Yoni says. “He breathes it out again.”

Cairo. Hail hammers roofs like an argument; then heat returns meaner, like the storm was a dare. Mariam rotates the babies away from the window wall and prays that the glass holds. The NICU monitors blink, hold, blink. A mother says God’s name over and over like water.

Khartoum. Ash settles on the courtyard like gray snow. Amal covers the buckets, tapes plastic over the pharmacy window, moves IVs away from the drips that come through cracks like the sky wants in. The

ward feels smaller; her prayers feel larger. Outside, goats bleat like they know the story.

Istanbul. Kerem watches a live feed of burning scrub on the far shore and thinks how the straits always witness other people's trouble. Then a gust shifts and a line of flame licks the edge of an industrial park that employs half his drivers' cousins. He scrambles masks from a stash and sends a text blast: *Stay home unless carrying bread or babies.*

Tripoli. Hail shreds tarps in the camps on the city's edge. Lina passes out trauma blankets and bandages for knees that tried to outrun the wind. She drones the breakwater to check for boats that thought they could race the storm—and finds one, overturned, men already wading in to flip it. Her footage catches a moment that will matter later: masked men dropping their masks to lift strangers.

Moscow. The official weather account posts a graphic with cheerful colors that does not match the view out Dmitri's window: trees dripping ice in summer, sky the color of old copper. He saves video, then helps Irina patch a leaking frame with plastic wrap and tape and a prayer that begins with a history lesson and ends with hope.

Jerusalem. Dust from the Negev sweeps the city mid-afternoon; then a sudden downpour turns streets to silt rivers and staircases to cataracts. Noam films water racing past stone and thinks of a verse about justice and streams. On the mount, the scaffolds hold. The altar looks small in all that weather, and exactly the right size.

Tehran. Arash meets two families at the edge of a park gone brown overnight. The bus won't run because a server farm in a province away is down due to the heat. He leads them on foot to a road Hossein calls the swallow way—and darts between shade and shadow. At a stand of trees, birds sit stunned on branches like ornaments, heat-drunk. He prays them through anyway.

Delhi. Hot wind sweeps the campus green to dust. A poster peels and flaps like a tired wing. Arun and Mathew carry crates of bottled water to the shade of the banyan. "Come," they tell students. "Drink without scanning." Someone films; someone else deletes the video because conscience outvotes curiosity for once.

DC/NY. Elena's map gets new pins she doesn't want to place. She texts all ten at once: *Breathe. Small obediences—water, shade, masks, rest. Document truth; do not argue with weather. Pray Psalm 29.* She reads it out loud, alone, to a room full of chargers —*The voice of the Lord is over the waters*—and feels peace that doesn't match the headlines.

Across the thread:

Noam: Ash on the tongue like a proverb. Still we sing.
Mariam: Hail, then heat. Babies held. God holds.
Yoni: Filters up. Children laughing at the shade tunnel like it's a fort.
Kerem: Flame close. Generators safe. Bread delivered.
Lina: Boat flipped. Men helped. Filmed mercy for

once.
Dmitri: Ice in summer. Irina says God is still punctual.
Arash: Swallow way open. Two families moved.
Arun: Water for all who come. No scans today.
Elena: The Lord sits as King forever. Strength to His people. Peace in the storm.

Night falls like the lid on a pot. The world simmers. The team sleeps in patches, wakes in prayers, and writes down what they saw because tomorrow will ask them what they remember. And somewhere a tree that should have burned does not, and somewhere grass that should be dead is green under a small rain that no forecast predicted.

22. Khartoum (Evacuation Corridor)

“In peace I will lie down and sleep,
For You alone, Lord, have me dwell in safety.”
— Psalm 4:8 (NASB2020)

The list on Amal’s forearm has turned into a slate: *IV tubing, oral rehydration salts, diesel, biscuits, names*. She adds three more names and circles *FARM TRACK —DAWN*. The rumor is a thread; she pulls it gently. Isaac nods. “If we go,” he says, “we go before anyone knows it is possible.”

Before sunrise, the courtyard gathers into a convoy: two pickups with tarps and red crosses painted by tired hands, a borrowed lorry with boards for seats, the clinic van with a door that won’t shut unless you love it. Mothers climb first. The men who insisted they don’t cry, cry and pretend it’s dust. Amal checks the sat phone, the pediatric bag, and the spare battery tucked inside a cereal box.

“Route?” Isaac asks.

“Bridge,” she says, and they both smile because crazy is normal now. “Then the orange grove track. Avoid the roundabout. If we have to pay a tax, we pay with dates.”

“Dates?” Isaac raises a brow.

“Men remember their mothers,” Amal says, and tucks a mesh bag behind the seat.

They roll. The city hasn’t fully woken; it moans in sleep. At the first corner, a dog lifts its head and

decides this convoy is not its problem. The sky is the color of old aluminum. At the bridge approach, a makeshift checkpoint grows out of two barrels and a board with a QR scrawled in black. Three men in new uniforms and mismatched shoes wave them to a stop.

“Medical,” Isaac calls. “Cholera.”

The nearest officer looks bored. “Scan. Digital only.”

Amal stands on the step, palms open. “You know us,” she says in Arabic. “We were here yesterday when your nephew’s fever broke.”

The man’s eyes snag on her. His mouth works. “I don’t have a nephew,” he says, but not like he believes himself.

“Then your neighbor,” she says, and tosses the mesh bag into his hands. “For your mother to make sweet tea.”

His fingers close on the dates like a decision. He lifts the board without looking left or right. The convoy slides past. Amal breathes, then breathes again.

Across the bridge, the road curls through the old market and out toward the fields. At the orange grove, they turn down a track that doesn’t exist if you only believe official maps. Trees throw a kindness of shade. The lorry’s boards creak with human weight and whispered prayers.

Halfway along the grove, a burst of gunfire pops from the road behind them. Not close, but not far. “Drive,” Amal says, and the word has grace in it this time, not panic. The track opens to a shallow *wadi*. The van

stutters. “Please,” Amal tells it, as if it loves compliments. It coughs, then obeys.

They clear the grove. A rusting water tower marks the farm compound—walls high, gate ajar. A young man with a farmer’s hat and a soldier’s posture waves them in. His name is Musa; his eyes are tired and good. “We can take thirty,” he says. “The rest to the schoolhouse two kilometers east. Latrines behind the date palms.”

Amal and the team triage by eyes, wrists, and breathing. Red tags to the shaded veranda. Yellow to the schoolhouse. Green—bless God for green—to the courtyard, where someone has already balanced a pot over a fire. She hears laughter from a corner and almost mistakes it for denial, but it is the sound of relief landing.

The sat phone buzzes. She wipes her hand on her vest and reads:

Elena: Window open?
Amal: Bridge passed. Orange grove. Two sites secure, for now.
Yoni: Sending extra salts and tabs north via truck. Driver knows the grove.
Mariam: Cairo scrounged IV sets. Labelled as “liturgical.” Don’t ask.
Kerem: If you need a second convoy, say so. Night run possible.

Amal: Night run yes. Roundabout hot. Use the low road beside the canal. Look for white cloth on the thorn fence.

Musa nods when she shows him the reply. “We will hang the cloth.”

By midday, the farmyard is a small city. A grandmother organizes a hand-washing station with queenly efficiency. A boy of ten becomes the IV watchman because his hands are small and steady. A militia pickup creeps past the lane and keeps going, as if the orange trees told it *nothing to see here*.

In the late afternoon, the lorry returns for a second lift. Amal rides back to the clinic for the remaining families and the records they refuse to leave behind because names matter. As they load, gunfire snaps three streets over. The men at the roundabout have grown bored or hungry; bored is worse. A bullet slaps the wall near the pharmacy window like a rude knock. Amal flinches, then finishes taping an IV.

On the return, they choose the canal road. A boy on a bicycle whistles twice from a culvert—*clear*—and Amal thinks of angels who use smaller wings now. The white cloth on the thorn fence flutters like an *amen*.

At the farm, night comes softly. Lanterns find faces. Someone brings a radio that only catches half a station and all of a hymn. Amal lists the names on paper that smells like storage. She hands the sheet to Musa. “If I don’t make it back,” she says, and then corrects herself, “When I am delayed, this is who matters.”

“You will make it back,” Musa says, and because hope is contagious, she nods.

She texts the team a final note before sleep in a corner on a mat that remembers other wars:

First lift out. Second by night. Farm and schoolhouse safe. Bridge open again at dawn? God knows. Pray for the boy with the soda-tab bracelet; he smiles when he breathes.

Dots from four countries answer. Then words.

Noam: The Lord encamps. Rest.
Elena: Two hours, Amal. Then rest. Obedience now is sleep.

She obeys.

23. Tripoli (Night Corridors)

“The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not grasp it.”
— John 1:5 (NASB2020)

The safehouse smells like cumin and sea air and smoke that isn’t from cooking. Lina kicks the charred doorframe and ash sulks into her shoe. Someone set the place alight after the port action, careful enough to keep it from spreading, deliberate enough to deliver a message: *We see you.*

Yusuf meets her in the alley with a bucket and a bitter grin. “Neighbors put it out. The men with masks watched. Our city—always a chorus.”

“How long do we have before they search the ground floor?” Lina asks.

“Long enough if we move now.”

They move. The clinic on wheels becomes the clinic on feet: a backpack with meds and a cooler that wants to be a fish box and is nobler now. The route is a thread through *wadis* and alleys, stitched by memory and the kind of maps you only carry in your head. The moon is two nights from full and kind enough to hide.

At the first turn, a checkpoint appears where yesterday there was a fruit stand. State security this time—uniforms that fit, radios that work. “Papers,” the senior says, and the word is less bored than usual.

“Medical,” Lina answers, badge up.

“Curfew,” he replies.

“Babies,” she says, and hears herself sounding like Mariam in Cairo. It makes her smile at the wrong time, which somehow helps. The officer looks past her at the cooler. “Fish?” he asks.

“Insulin,” she says, and lets him wrestle with the idea that the cooler can save lives better this way. He waves them on, not wanting to be the man who delayed mercy.

They cut into the *wadi*—a shallow, sandy gash lined with scrub. The city’s lights exhale above them like a ceiling too far away to matter. Saho, the teenage runner, pads ahead with fox-quiet feet. He signals twice: *dog; men*. They detour under a culvert where graffiti quotes a psalm in mangled Arabic and still hits true: *Even the darkness is not dark to You*.

The first drop is a flat with an asthmatic grandmother and a boy whose breath can’t decide if it’s staying. Lina checks the inhaler, the spacer, the window that sticks; she leaves a card with a number that isn’t hers and is. “Call if his chest pulls in here,” she says, touching her collarbone. The boy imitates her and laughs, and the sound makes everyone remember that morning is a thing.

At the second drop, a man with a stitched cheek from the port stares at the insulin as if it’s a tale from a kinder world. “How do I pay without a scan?” he asks, not challenging, just exhausted.

“You already did,” Lina says. “You lifted the boat.”

He shakes his head. “That was my cousin.”

She shrugs. “God saw you both.”

Onward. A drone whines overhead somewhere far enough to be mostly a threat and near enough to be real. The team flattens into shadow as if they were taught by cats. Lina's heart beats evenly and loud. She whispers John 1:5 without deciding to, and the words are more than courage; they are description.

They pass the safehouse's smoking shadow again on the way to the final drop. A figure steps from the darkness, and Lina's hand finds the small metal whistle at her neck. "Easy," the figure says, and steps into a strip of moon. The old woman from the port—the one with eyes like wet stone—stands with a loaf wrapped in paper. "For your hands," she says. "They look too empty."

"We can't take bread," Yusuf starts.

"We can," Lina interrupts, and accepts the loaf because refusing would be worse than a policy violation. "Thank you."

The old woman nods toward the burned door. "They fear what they cannot purchase," she says. "Keep giving it away."

The last drop is the trickiest: a family in a warehouse district where the state camera grid is smug. Saho pops the latch with a tool he calls "the key to sleepy locks," and they slip through a maze of pallets and air that tastes like cardboard. The child's fever broke; the mother's didn't. Lina starts an antibiotic, prays over water that is clean enough and courage that is not, and leaves a dose packet folded into a Scripture slip thin enough to hide in a shoe.

On the way out, the whine of the drone lowers. It's not searching; it is showing off. Saho mutters something unprintable. Yusuf hisses. Lina puts a hand on Saho's shoulder and feels the coil of a young spring. "Not tonight," she whispers. He nods, swallows, and the night exhales with him.

Back at the clinic van, they stash the cooler in a compartment that looks like rust but is smarter. The safehouse will need a new door; the neighbors will choose it tomorrow from a pile that looks like junk and isn't.

Her sat phone buzzes.

Lina: Safehouse burned (contained). Night corridor complete—three drops. State eyes open. God's too.
Kerem: Generator part moving by land. Stay ghost.
Mariam: Praying over that insulin and those hands.
Elena: Good work. Sleep somewhere new tonight. Rotate patterns.

Lina walks three extra blocks to a friend's place that looks like nobody lives there, and is full of kindness. She breaks the old woman's loaf with Yusuf and Saho and prays, stumbling and sincere. The city hums like a ship's engine through the walls. She sleeps with her shoes by the door and her whistle under her palm.

24. Addis Ababa (Off-Ledger Mercy)

“He has told you, mortal one, what is good;
And what does the Lord require of you
But to do justice, to love kindness,
And to walk humbly with your God?”
— Micah 6:8 (NASB2020)

The aid depot ledger frowns at Yoni like an accountant who hasn’t slept. New column: *COMPLIANCE ID VERIFIED*. New stamp: *UNIFIED ACCESS* with a smiling wallet icon that looks wrong next to latrine parts. “Pilot order,” the clerk says, not happy, not cruel. “No verification, no release.”

“We built these kits with donations that didn’t scan,” Yoni says mildly. “Let’s not insult them now.”

The clerk’s eyes say *I agree*; his tablet says *I don’t*. He shrugs the way exhausted men shrug. “If I override, I lose access for my own family.”

“Don’t,” Yoni says immediately. “We’ll route around.”

Back at Blue Nile, Tesfaye rubs his beard and swears softly in a language that sounds like velvet. “Off-ledger?”

“Off-ledger,” Yoni says. “We make an honesty that the system does not have a word for.”

They inventory what isn’t tagged yet: *rope, soap, three filters, chlorine tabs, dignity*. Yoni sketches a plan: trade soap for maize with the woman near the east gate, swap two filters for a sack of caps to measure chlorine, borrow a donkey from the priest who never

asks questions about donkeys. “We will offend fewer angels if we keep receipts,” Tesfaye says. They laugh, then write receipts for a God who reads hearts.

At the camp, a militia jeep loiters by the checkpoint, men watching boredom like a show. They “tax” entry *CBDC only*, which would be funny if hunger weren’t watching. Yoni and Tesfaye set up a water point inside the fence by the latrines and turn the work into a class. “You, teacher,” Yoni says to the girl with bright eyes from last week. “Show me the cap math.” She does, dead serious, like she’s holding a scalpel. He gives her a new bar of soap and a job title: *Water Captain*.

A mother approaches with a bundle that turns into a child with a stare like an old man. “We can’t scan,” she says, shame choking a sentence that should never hold shame. “They say the clinic is not for us.”

“The clinic is for you,” Yoni says, and escorts them past the gaze of men who like power as a hobby. Inside the tent, the volunteer nurse from down the road—who scans without liking it—pretends she didn’t see Yoni pretend he didn’t see the sign.

Outside, a young militia man leans on the gate and studies Yoni like a puzzle. “Why so gentle?” he asks, genuinely curious.

“Because anger doesn’t fix pumps,” Yoni says.

The man snorts, then half-smiles. “My mother says the same.”

“Listen to your mother,” Yoni says, pressing a spare sandwich into the man’s hand like it’s unimportant. The man eats without ceremony.

By afternoon, the off-ledger plan is a rhythm: caps counted, chlorine tab sacks traded for maize, soap portioned and wrapped in pages from a notebook that says *SCIENCE* on the cover. They keep a ledger on paper that will make no sense to officials and perfect sense to saints: *Two bars of soap → five kilos maize (Alem); Filter core → caps (Biniam); Donkey → sermon IOU (Father Yohannes).*

His sat phone buzzes.

Yoni: Depot tied to IDs. Moving off-ledger—receipts in heaven, paper here. Camp supplied. Water Captain appointed.
Kerem: You’re a better economist than Brussels.
Amal: Teach me your receipts. We’ll need them.
Elena: Wise as serpents. Keep your accounts clean before God. Proud of you.
Noam: Micah 6:8 with mud on it. Beautiful.

Near dusk, the militia men get bored with being gatekeepers and decide to be hunters. They bump a stall, laugh too loudly, and aim their attention like a gun. The young one with the sandwich keeps his eyes on the ground. The older one kicks a jerrycan like a football and startles a toddler into tears.

Yoni doesn’t raise his voice. He walks over with a bucket and a smile that is not friendly and not hostile, just human. “Come,” he says to the older man. “Help me lift this.” The man sneers, then lifts without

meaning to. People watch. Helping turns his face back into someone's son. He puts the bucket down and mutters, "We go," to his partner. They go.

Tesfaye exhales a laugh. "You baptized him with a bucket," he says.

"I baptized my own temper," Yoni replies.

On the walk out, the priest with the donkey intercepts them with a bag of onions and a proverb. "Water flows where it is invited," he says. "So does mercy." He hands Yoni the onions. "For soup."

Evening at the office. They count what's left and what God multiplied in very boring ways—five loaves, two filters, and a hundred small obediences. Yoni writes a line at the bottom of the off-ledger book: *We did justice. We loved kindness. We tried to walk humbly.* He adds a smiley face because sometimes you need to remind yourself to be a child.

He texts Mariam a photo of the Water Captain grinning with a bar of soap like a trophy. Mariam replies with a NICU photo of tiny feet and the caption: *The small are strong*. Yoni believes her.

Before sleep, he prays Micah 6:8 over the camp and over his own temptation to be efficient instead of kind. The donkey brays in the alley like an *amen*. He laughs, then sleeps the uncomplicated sleep of a man who kept receipts heaven approves.

25. Istanbul (Scores and Shadows)

“A false balance is an abomination to the Lord,
But a just weight is His delight.”
— Proverbs 11:1 (NASB2020)

Kerem watches the TrustScore dashboard molt. New tabs bloom: *Civic Reliability, Misinformation Risk, Public Harmony*. The UI smiles like an usher. The back-end notes read like threats with good bedside manners.

“Pilot extension,” Murat says, breezing past his desk with a coffee that smells like surrender. “Same shipments, new hoops. You’re good at hoops.”

“I prefer doors,” Kerem answers.

“Doors require friends,” Murat says. “Friends require favors.”

At the warehouse, Ece points with her chin at a laminated memo: *CERTIFIED ENTITIES PRIORITIZED*. Beneath, smaller: *Community Partners may request provisional certification with a sponsor*. She’s already drawn arrows. “We can sponsor two small clinics,” she says. “Three if we don’t sleep.”

“Do it,” Kerem says. “Quietly.”

They split a shipment three ways on paper, so the algorithm thinks it is three smaller moral questions instead of one large ethical dilemma. Mustafa drives, chewing sunflower seeds like penance. At Kapıkule,

the Customs officer taps his tablet like a woodpecker thinking it's a piano.

"Your entity's civic reliability dipped," the officer says conversationally.

Kerem forces a smile. "How unreliable is a generator?"

The officer's mouth twitches. He stamps the paper anyway. Mustafa winks at Kerem without looking at him. They roll.

On the return, the radio coughs news of a "security corridor" through the straits—green lanes for certified goods, red for everyone else. Kerem texts the team:

Kerem: TrustScore deepens. Corridor = gate for some, wall for others. Sponsoring two clinics under our umbrella. Pray for clean hands in muddy water.
Elena: Good. Keep receipts; keep your soul. If a post costs a shipment, pick the shipment.
Noam: Weights and measures belong to the Lord. He sees your ledger.
Yoni: If you need off-ledger tips, my donkey is available for consultation.

At night, the café circle prays under a bulb that buzzes like a tired bee. Tía reads Proverbs 11 and flicks the page with a finger that looks like it has rebuked generations. "False balances everywhere," she says. "We keep ours true." Hakan, the translator, shows a draft of a pamphlet: *How to Get Help Without a QR*. Kerem pares five adjectives, adds two phone numbers, removes one reckless sentence, then underlines a line

about churches that will feed you whether you scan or not.

Ece arrives late, flush with a win. “Generator part cleared,” she says. “To Libya by land.” She looks at Kerem without teasing. “Thank you for letting my name be the one on the form.”

“Thank you for making the form honest,” he answers.

They walk out together. On the bridge, the wind plays judge. “Do you ever feel like we’re installing pieces of a machine we might hate later?” Ece asks.

“Yes,” Kerem says. “But babies need power today.”

She nods. “That’s how I sleep.”

“Also tea,” Kerem offers.

“Also tea,” she agrees, and they laugh like people who know tea is not enough and helps anyway.

He texts Elena privately: *When the score says I’m unreliable, am I allowed to be pleased?*
Her reply: *Yes—if it’s for the right reasons. Don’t cultivate it. Just don’t worship the green check.*

Before sleep, he leaves groceries again at the widow’s door and adds a note: *YOU ARE SEEN.* He writes it in block letters because he’s tired of algorithms deciding who gets to read cursive.

26. Beijing (Water and Fire)

"When you pass through the waters, I will be with you;
And through the rivers, they will not overflow you.
When you walk through the fire, you will not be scorched,
Nor will the flame burn you."
— Isaiah 43:2 (NASB2020)

The detention center smells like rubber gloves and boiled socks. Jia brings food twice this week, once turned away, once allowed. She never gets to see Auntie Mei, but the guard who takes the bag looks at the label longer than necessary and says, "We will deliver it," like a man bargaining with his own reflection.

House-church meetings are smaller now, and stranger: laundry rooms, stairwells, a park where sprinklers surprise everyone and save the meeting from a camera with bad timing. Baptisms happen in a kitchen sink—cup by cup over the head, Psalm by Psalm over the heart. Chen grins with wet hair and a prayer that lands like a vow. Jia whispers, "Welcome," and feels the word echo.

Surveillance tightens. The door camera pings for faces Jia doesn't recognize twice in an hour, then goes silent, as if it has learned its lesson. A new poster in the courtyard says *UNIFIED ID = UNITY* with a smiling family that looks suspiciously symmetrical. The copy shop girl with ink on her hands writes verses

on slips and hides them in lamination pouches labeled *BEST WISHES*.

Jia's sat phone vibrates only in the safe windows now. She forces herself to be brief.

Jia: Auntie still held. Baptisms by sink. Meetings smaller; faith not. Watching for betrayal. Pray for Chen's boldness to become wisdom without dimming.
Elena: With you. Two actions: rotate safe flats; memorize three Psalms for rooms with no paper.
Noam: Psalm 27. "The Lord is my light and my salvation."
Arun: We're singing for you here. Windows open, hearts open.

That night, a choice arrives. A friend-of-a-friend sends a single line: *Exit possible Thursday*. A route, a van, a gap in a shift schedule, a price not denominated in currency. Elena echoes it from DC without pushing. *Option open. Either answer okay*.

Jia stares at the message until the screen dims, then locks the phone, as if closing a door she might open again.

She goes to see the mother of the neighbor who was taken in the raid. The woman pours scalding tea into a glass as thin as courage and asks no questions. When she finally speaks, it is to tell a story about her son when he was seven and rescued a cat from a gutter. "He cried after," she says, surprised by her own memory. "From relief." They cry together and do not call it a strategy. It is.

In the morning, Jia meets the remnant in a stairwell that smells like cabbage and prayer. “I have an exit on Thursday,” she tells them. Silence like a held breath. “I think I’m supposed to stay.”

Auntie Mei is not there to nod, so the copy shop girl nods for her. “Then we stay with you,” she says.

“No,” Jia says, gentle iron. “You stay with Jesus. If He says run, run. If He says hide, hide. If He says sing, sing.” She looks at Chen. “If He says be silent, obey Him and drive me crazy.”

Chen laughs, then grows solemn. “He says sing,” he whispers.

They sing low. *The Lord is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear?* The melody wraps the stairwell like gauze on a wound it cannot close and can still make clean.

Thursday comes. The van comes. Jia does not. She memorizes Psalms 27, 46, and 121 while kneading dough for noodles so her body doesn’t tell on her to the neighbors. The van carries two others—one old, one very young—and Jia thanks God for empty space filled on purpose.

That night, she dreams of water and fire arguing. In the dream, neither wins. God walks between. She wakes before dawn to a message from an unnumbered source: *Auntie moved. Station 7.* She texts one word to Elena: *Staying*. Elena replies with three: *Seen. Strength. Songs.*

Jia ties her hair, pockets verse slips, and steps into a city that has decided to be reasonable today. She buys

peaches with cash. The seller looks at the coins like they are fossils. She smiles until he smiles back.

When she gets home, a new poster has gone up: *BE A HARMONY MAKER. REPORT DISRUPTORS.* Someone has already drawn a mustache on the smiling father. Jia shouldn't smile. She does.

She kneads dough again and sings for the room and for the man in Station 7 and for Auntie Mei and for the two who left in the van and for herself—sheep, serpent, daughter, witness. The kettle hisses like applause.

27. Delhi (The Window)

“For we cannot stop speaking about what we have seen and heard.”
— Acts 4:20 (NASB2020)

Pastor Mathew’s warning lands like a weather report: “Arrests tonight,” he says, eyes on a message only he can see. “They will grab two pastors and three loud students to show balance.”

Arun’s stomach flips. “Me?”

“Not tonight,” Mathew says. “But soon. Keep your window ready.”

He knows which window: the three-minute pocket when the Desk Four supervisor smokes where cameras can’t quite see and the campus gate cam hands off to the street cam with a hiccup that looks like a blink. He has rehearsed the speech without meaning to: not a rant, not a fight, just a testimony clean enough to go viral and hard enough to be worth it.

All day, the city acts like it’s fine. Posters get refreshed. Saffron flags sprout and fold. A street musician tunes a sitar by ear. Desk agents “assist” with smiles that don’t reach their eyes. Arun tutors two students under the banyan—logic proofs and grammar, and the Gospel, like he serves it with tea.

At dusk, the hush falls. Police vans idle like beasts taught to heel. Mathew squeezes his shoulder. “If the Spirit says speak,” he says, “I’ll stand to your left.”

“And if He says run?” Arun asks.

“I’ll trip anyone who chases you,” Mathew says, and manages to make it a joke and a promise at once.

The window opens. The supervisor lights his cigarette like a liturgy. The gate camera blinks. Arun steps onto the low wall and begins.

“I’m not here because I hate you,” he says, voice steady. “I’m here because I love you. They will tell you convenience is mercy. It isn’t. Mercy has a face. His name is Jesus.”

Phones rise. The blunt edge of the crowd tilts toward him. A Desk agent steps forward and hesitates the width of a conscience. Mathew shifts left and becomes a pillar in the frame.

“You do not need to sell your soul to buy bread,” Arun says. “You do not need to kneel to men to stand upright.” He quotes Daniel and Peter without references because the references will be in the comments in three minutes.

A hand shoves. This time, he sees it. The shove is clumsy, overcommitted; he steadies himself with the broken pole he keeps like a relic. The crowd gasps the way crowds do when a story writes itself in front of them.

Someone yells, “Traitor!” Someone else yells, “Saint!” Arun refuses both. “I’m a servant,” he says, and raises the scarf-wrapped pole. The scarf has a cross stitched in one corner by a grandmother somewhere who never meant to make a flag and did.

Sirens. The vans lurch. Officers move in a wave. The window closes with a slam he feels in his teeth. Mathew leans in. “Now we kneel,” he says, and they do—on concrete, in dust. The posture confuses the choreography. The officers check their training manual and find no page for this.

“Arrest them,” a voice crackles from a radio.

“On what charge?” an officer mutters without muting, and his partner shrugs like a man who does not get paid enough to make new law.

Students—some who hate him, some who love him, all curious—line the edge of the scene with their cameras. A Desk agent tries to seize one phone and gets filmed by five others. The vans hesitate like beasts that lost their scent.

Mathew rises first. He offers his hands as if to be cuffed. “If you must,” he says. The officer stares at the open hands and sees his own father for a second. He looks away. “Go home,” he says to everyone and no one.

They go, in the chaotic order of any dispersal. Arun feels the tremor belatedly. Mathew grips his arm. “Tea,” the pastor commands.

At the church, they watch the video that is already everywhere: a young man speaking without spitting, a scarf on a broken pole, a kneel that disarmed men with more power than wisdom. The caption wars begin: *HATE PREACHER vs FREEDOM VOICE vs CULTIST vs BROTHER*. Arun doesn’t read them. He texts the team:

Arun: Spoke in the window. Kneeling confused them. Not arrested. Video out. Pray that the fruit is obedience, not fame.
Elena: Well done. Go dark for 48 hours. Rotate housing. No solo walks.
Noam: Standing with you on our knees.
Jia: Acts 4:20, brother. We're singing with you.

Night. The vans prowl other streets; two pastors and two students do not come home. Arun kneels by his bed in a borrowed room and prays the simplest prayer he knows: "Jesus, make me small and true." He sleeps with the pole by the door and the scarf under his cheek like a promise he doesn't deserve and is allowed to hold.

28. Tehran (Border at Night)

“Do not fear, for I am with you;
Do not be afraid, for I am your God.
I will strengthen you, I will also help you,
I will also uphold you with My righteous right hand.”
— Isaiah 41:10 (NASB2020)

Arash lays the map on the bakery table upside down so anyone glancing thinks he’s bad at directions. Hossein traces a route with a toothpick: ring road, the dry canal, the radio mast, the pomegranate grove, the shepherd’s cut. “Stop here,” he says, tapping the grove. “If there is a patrol, the dogs bark first.”

“Two families,” Arash says. “One child with asthma. One grandmother who will not scan on principle and ankles that say she should ride, not walk.”

“Principle can ride in the cart,” Hossein replies, smiling.

They launch at moonrise. The city exhales them into its dust like a blessing it doesn’t mean but can’t take back. Arash sits in the back, packs braced with his knees: water, dates, a small compressor for the child’s nebulizer, two blankets that smell like storage and safety.

At the canal, the driver kills the lights and memory takes the wheel. They creep past a construction site that wasn’t on the satellite image—fresh rebar, a cement mixer like a sleeping elephant. Arash adjusts the route by a hundred meters in his head and feels a

ridiculous flare of joy: he is more than a man who analyzes; he is a man who decides.

They reach the pomegranate grove by the second crow. The trees hold their fruit like lanterns. The shepherd's dog does, in fact, bark first. A second dog barks back like a conversation. Hossein squeezes Arash's shoulder. "Good sign." They wait for the silence to settle correctly; then they move.

At the earthen berm, a patrol hums into view—two men, one smoking, one pretending not to be tired. Hossein whispers, "We offer a story before they ask for one."

"What story?"

"The one that's true," Hossein says. "Sick child. Visiting uncle. Papers? Lost in chaos at the station."

The men wave them down. The smoker's flashlight finds faces, then the compressor. He snorts. "You picked a windy night to lie."

Arash holds the child's inhaler to the small mouth and counts breaths louder than he needs to. The beam lingers on the grandmother's ankles, on the blankets, on Hossein's hands, which look stubbornly like a farmer's even when he is smuggling mercy.

"Papers," the second guard says without conviction.

"Lost," Hossein answers. "We can go back and look."

The smoker swears softly, annoyed at the hassle of compassion. He points the light past them. "Road's clear until the curve," he says. "After that, I don't know you."

“Understood,” Hossein says. He offers a cigarette from his breast pocket without looking like he’s offering a bribe. The smoker takes it and does not light it. He pockets it like a rain check on temptation.

They roll. At the curve, a pebbled wash cuts the track. The cart jolts; the grandmother mutters a psalm in Farsi and English like she’s braiding rope. Arash reaches for the compressor—still there, still humming like a patient bee. He prays the prayer that has become his habit: *Lord, keep us from cleverness that outpaces obedience.*

The border itself is a fence that appears to have opinions. The cut is lower than Arash hoped and higher than the grandmother’s ankles deserve. Hossein kneels and makes a stirrup with his hands. Arash takes the grandmother under the arms and lifts. She is as light as a memory. On the far side, a shadow detaches from shadows. Arash tenses; Hossein doesn’t.

“Kerem’s friend,” the shadow whispers in Turkish-accented Farsi. “This way.” A small convoy. A larger God.

They shuffle down the swallow way—scrub, stone, sand. A coyote yips like laughter. On a rise, the whole route behind them lays out like a story that could have gone wrong and didn’t.

At the drop, the contact signs: *WATER* with two fingers, then *MILK* with a curving hand, the code they agreed: the child will be seen; the grandmother will sleep where a priest pretends not to see her; the cart

will return with different blankets and the same courage. Hossein presses dates into the contact's palm, because men remember their mothers. The contact grins. "We all do."

On the return, the patrol is gone. The dog sleeps. The mixer looks like an animal that decided not to wake. Arash exhales the breath he held three hours too long.

His sat phone buzzes when they clear the ring road.

Arash: Two families across. Patrol bored into mercy. Return clean.
Kerem: Door stayed open. Well done. "Kerem's friend" says the grandmother blessed him like his own.
Elena: Proud of the obedience, not the clever. Sleep before you debrief.
Mariam: If one needs Cairo, send a breadcrumb trail. We'll follow it.
Noam: Psalm 121 over your roads. He kept your foot.

Arash laughs, relief shaking loose from his ribs. "He kept our ankles," he tells Hossein.

"Ankles are theology," Hossein says gravely, and turns the truck toward breakfast.

29. Cairo (Blackout Mercy)

“If a brother or sister is without clothing and in need of daily food, and one of you says to them, ‘Go in peace, be warmed and be filled,’ yet you do not give them what is necessary for their body, what use is that?”
— James 2:15–16 (NASB2020)

The lights die like a sentence cut mid-word. The NICU’s backup battery ticks down in ugly numbers. Mariam doesn’t check them. She moves—manual ventilation, reposition, count, hum, pray. The generator’s borrowed part coughs and quits; the maintenance tech swears at the ceiling like it might answer.

“ETA on the new part?” Mariam asks.

“Tomorrow, if God likes paperwork,” the tech says. “Next week if He doesn’t.”

Mariam thinks of Elena’s crate—*Liturgical Supplies*—crawling across borders on the patience of saints and a mislabel. She texts short:

Mariam: Grid down. Battery bleeding. Need the part today.
Kerem: On the ring road. Two checkpoints. Praying for bored guards.
Lina: If it stalls in Libya, I’ll push it myself.
Elena: Part inbound via “candlesticks.” Courage. Two hours.

Two hours is a lifetime and a blink. Mariam assigns stations, rotates wrists, and keeps the room from shrinking to panic. A father starts to quote a statistic from a news feed, and she interrupts with a verse because statistics are cruel in a blackout, and the verse is not: *He will carry the lambs in His arms*. The man repeats it in Arabic with a cadence that sounds like learning to breathe.

Downstairs, the corridor becomes a river. Patients without scans argue with a clerk who hates his job and hates himself for hating it. The *UPGRADE FOR ACCESS* poster hangs askew, a joke no one laughs at today. The pharmacist quietly slides a bag of samples to a woman who pretends not to be grateful and is.

A rattle at the loading bay. A van that looks like it belongs to a church and does, in a way. Ece leans out, hair in a knot, eyes bright with exhaustion and a grin. “Your candlesticks,” she says, tapping the crate.

Customs stamped it in two places and looked the other way in one more. The matron signs a paper that might be a hymn and might be a lie and is, today, a liturgy of mercy. The maintenance tech kisses the crate without irony. “Blessed be,” he says, and sprints for the stairs.

Forty minutes later, the generator coughs, catches, and steadies. The NICU monitors come up one after another like flowers in time-lapse. Someone laughs the way people laugh at funerals when death forgets to show.

Mariam leans on the door frame and cries in a quiet corner because she can. The matron finds her, presses her forehead to Mariam's like a mother and a general combined. "Share the weight," she orders. "And find lunch like a Christian."

Mariam eats half a *falafel* and divides the other half between a nurse and a grandmother who is fasting and shouldn't be. She texts the team:

Mariam: Power restored. Part arrived labeled "candlesticks." Babies stable. Clerk downstairs still forced to scan; he hates it. Pray for him.
Kerem: Your "candlesticks" nearly became incense at Checkpoint Two. God distracted a captain.
Elena: Good. Rotate sleep. Thank the tech twice.
Noam: Isaiah 40 again: He will carry the lambs.

Evening brings a different line at the gate: protesters with signs—*NO MARK, NO MEDICINE?*—and a counter-line—*ORDER SAVES LIVES*—and a police line like parentheses. Mariam steps out, not as a nurse this time but as a neighbor. "We're keeping the babies alive," she says to both sides. "If you love them, don't trample the door."

A woman lowers her sign. A man mutters, then quiets. A policeman looks relieved at having a reason not to swing his baton. The crowd breathes like a chest unclenching. The matron appears behind Mariam with arms folded in a way that is somehow a benediction and a threat.

Night. The hum of the generator sounds like a psalm. Mariam writes three names on her palm—*Ayman* (the

clerk), *Rasha* (the grandmother), *Yusuf* (the tech)—and prays them like a list God wanted first. She sends a photo of a small hand clutching her finger to the thread.

Yoni: We see that hand. Water Captain says hi.
Lina: I'll buy actual candlesticks for that tech.
Amal: The Lord lights the lamp.
Elena: He does. Sleep.

Mariam obeys for ninety minutes. It is enough. The babies keep breathing. The city holds. God does not need electricity. He is kind enough to send some anyway.

30. Jerusalem (Council Words, Stone Hearts)

“It will come about on that day that I will make Jerusalem a heavy stone for all the peoples; all who lift it will injure themselves severely…”
— Zechariah 12:3 (NASB2020)

The Global Council liaison returns in a smarter suit and a softer voice. The press scrum smells like sunscreen and nerves. “Unified identity brings unity,” he says into ten microphones. “Order is compassion at scale.” The words drape the plaza like banners; the stone does not notice.

Noam films from the shadow of a column, lens narrow. He catches hands again—how they telegraph fear and faith before mouths do. A grandmother gripping a psalm scroll. A young officer gripping his baton like a man trying not to be the kind of man who grips batons.

Avner murmurs, “Stay on ceremony.”

“Ceremony is about to be conflict again,” Noam answers, not unkindly.

A religious councilman thanks the Council for “respecting heritage within harmonized frameworks.” A rabbi quotes Isaiah about a house of prayer for all nations; a counter-chant replies with a different verse from Isaiah that promises no rest for the wicked. The crowd becomes a braid that the police try to comb and can’t.

The thin man in the linen *tallit* appears at Noam's elbow as if he stepped from a fold in the day. "Hello again," he says.

Noam swallows surprise. "You hear the drum?" he asks.

"It is louder," the man says. He looks at the liaison. "Words want to be kings today."

"Do they get to be?" Noam asks.

"For a moment," the man says, and then smiles like a hillside at sunrise. "But the King has other ways."

A chant surges: *NO MARK IN THE COURT!*; a counter: *ORDER FOR ALL!*; a third, quieter, from a corner too small to matter and therefore dangerous: *Messiah now*. Police move. The altar glows in late light. A boy in white shakes and keeps moving anyway. Noam's hands are steady; his heart is not. He records the steadiness and the shake.

His sat phone buzzes.

Elena: Out routes? Keep water on you. Thirty-sec archive when safe.
Noam: North stair open. South jammed. Smoke, not incense. Sending clip.
Mariam: Praying Psalm 122.
Arash: Roads on our end open if you need to vanish for a day.

A bottle arcs, a chant cracks, a baton lifts and hesitates. David, the pastor, materializes the way shepherds do in storms—calm in skin. He touches elbows, redirects a shove into a stumble, into an

apology. “Peace,” he says to one; “Stand,” to another; “Drink,” to Noam, and hands him a water bottle like a sacrament.

The liaison’s security detail hustles him off-mic. A junior official stays and ad-libs: “Our partners in the EU and PRC have proven that harmonization saves lives.” His voice wobbles on *saves*. The crowd hears the wobble like blood in water. Noam keeps filming the wobble because truth is in tremors.

A tremor of a different kind passes underfoot. Noam feels it in his teeth. The plaza hushes the way flocks hush before a hawk’s shadow. It is only a truck hitting a grate somewhere, probably. Or it is the city reminding men who owns the bass note.

The thin man’s eyes sharpen. “Soon,” he says. “Be ready to stand in the place you are told, and not the place you would choose.” He walks away as if he were late to an appointment with the wind.

Noam cuts a thirty-second reel: hands, water, smoke, the junior official’s wobble, a child on her father’s shoulders covering her ears and refusing to cry. He labels it *Words and Stones, Day 5*, and sends it to Elena, the archive, and the folder that still has the melodramatic name. He texts the team:

Noam: Council words, stone hearts. Tension like wire. We filmed truth without adding heat. I met the *tallit* man again. He says “soon.”
Elena: Noted. Hydrate. Keep your shoes by the door.
Kerem: If you need a night in Istanbul, I know a bridge.

Jia: Psalm 27. Light, salvation. Fear not.
Arun: On my knees with you.

Evening wraps the city in gold that pretends peace. Noam walks the northern stair with David. “Do you think we’ll live to see the day the stones cry out?” Noam asks.

David smiles like a man who believes ridiculous things because God is famous for them. “I think they’re warming up,” he says.

At home, Noam takes off his shoes and sets them by the door in obedience. He writes three names in his notebook—*Avi* (the young officer), *Tamar* (the grandmother with the scroll), *Eitan* (the boy in white)—and prays them into the night. The low note is still there, steady, certain, getting closer. He sleeps, camera on the table, water bottle full, bag by the door, ready to stand where he is told.

Midpoint: Day ~1,260 - The Abomination

31. Jerusalem (The Abomination)

“Therefore when you see the abomination of desolation which was spoken of through Daniel the prophet, standing in the holy place… then those who are in Judea must flee to the mountains.”
— Matthew 24:15–16 (NASB2020)

Noam wakes to the kind of quiet that pretends to be mercy and isn’t. The air has that low note again, louder—like the city has been holding its breath for a thousand mornings and has decided this is the one to exhale.

Avner texts at dawn: *Short call time. Minimal crew. ‘Symbolic event,’ they say.*
David adds: *If the Lord says move, you move.*

The plaza looks smaller today. Security cordons stack like nested bowls. The temporary altar stands dressed too cleanly, as if scrubbed for a photograph. A delegation arrives—suits with smiles that have been practiced, a device under a drape, cameras in a hush that means everything is already decided.

“Stay on ceremony,” Avner whispers, as if saying it can make it true.

A chant rises at the south stair, then dies as if someone put a hand over its mouth. Noam frames linen, stone, light, breath. He catches the junior official from last week—wobble gone, eyes flat. A priestly instructor bows—too slowly, Noam thinks, and realizes his heart is trying to measure obedience on a stopwatch.

Then the drape comes off.

It is metal and arrogance—a composite idol wrapped in state language, flanked by banners that say *HARMONY* in six scripts. The Council liaison speaks first, words like lacquer: “A sign of unity… a synthesis of heritage within a global frame.” A murmur moves the crowd like wind combing wheat. Three men in white step back, faces drained. The fourth, a younger one, stares, unblinking, like a boy who just saw a wolf in the schoolyard.

Noam’s hands go cold. David’s hand finds his elbow. “Film,” the pastor says, not as an order but as a calling.

The image is wrong in the gut before minds can draft objections. Security shifts formation—closing, not guarding. The liaison recites a line about “peace through obedience,” and the word *obedience* lands like a nail in a board that didn’t consent. A voice—Noam cannot tell from where—calls out Isaiah; another answers with Jeremiah; a third curses in a language no psalm can fix.

The thing is moved toward the place that should never hold it.

Noam’s lens keeps finding hands—one trembling on a knife hilt; one gripping a baton too tightly; one—Tamar’s, the grandmother—clutching her psalm scroll until the paper creases like skin. A boy—Eitan—takes a half-step forward, then falters as if caught between two fathers.

Then it happens—the placing, the pose, the speech that congratulates itself for being brave enough to offend and clever enough to call it kindness. Noam doesn't hear the end of the sentence. The low note under the city turns into a crack, and the stones say something men can't yet translate.

"North stair," David says, already moving.

They go. Noam keeps the camera rolling until a shield fills the frame and a gloved hand swats the lens. He stumbles, recovers, follows David through a seam in the crowd, past a toppled barricade, into the thinner air of the stair. Behind them, the sound changes from speech to animal panic and back again. Above them, a drone stutters, then drops from the sky like a toy with its batteries yanked. Jamming, or something else.

His sat phone fights for a signal and wins a thin thread.

Noam: It's here. Abomination. North stair. Fleeing.
Elena: Go. Hills. Burst-mode only.
Mariam: Praying Psalm 27.
Arun: With you.
Jia: We are singing you up the stairs.

At the gate, Avi—the young officer—stands rigid, eyes wet and furious, baton down. He sees David, sees Noam, and his face makes a choice. "Go," he says hoarsely, stepping aside. "Quickly." The word is a benediction and a confession.

They push into alleys that remember how to hide pilgrims. Noam's lungs burn. David is as steady as prayer. A woman opens a door, pulls a child inside,

then beckons them to cut through her courtyard without a word. They do. The city behind them roars a sound older than politics.

On the ridge above the northern road, they meet others—old men who look like boys, girls who refuse to cry until they're safe, a mother with twin toddlers tied to her waist like anchors and sails. Noam turns once, just once, and sees smoke that is not an offering. He records one steady shot and then drops the camera to his chest, breath hitching.

"Will they follow?" a man pants.

"Some will," David says. "And some won't think they need to."

"What do we do?"

"We keep moving," David answers. "We trust the Lord and help each other to the hills."

They move. The sat phone pings once more.

Elena: Radio silence after this unless emergency. You are covered in prayer. God go before you and behind you.
Noam: He is. Shoes on. Hills ahead.

He tucks the phone away, shoulders the camera, and follows the line of people into a scrubby path that looks like it's been waiting for them since Joshua. Somewhere below, men argue about words. Somewhere above, wind combs the grass and does not care about microphones. Noam puts one foot in front of the other and prays the simplest prayer he knows: *Keep us, Lord. Keep us.*

32. The Beast and the Prophet

“There was given to him a mouth speaking arrogant words and blasphemies, and authority to act for forty-two months was given to him… and all who live on the earth will worship him, everyone whose name has not been written… in the book of life.”
— Revelation 13:5, 8 (NASB2020)

“Then I saw another beast coming up out of the earth… He performs great signs, so that he even makes fire come down out of heaven to the earth in the presence of people. And he deceives those who live on the earth… And it was given to him to give breath to the image of the beast…”
— Revelation 13:11–15 (NASB2020)

“And he makes all… to be given a mark on their right hand or on their forehead… and he decrees that no one will be able to buy or to sell, except the one who has the mark… the number of his name.”
— Revelation 13:16–17 (NASB2020)

In Jerusalem, the square that tasted blasphemy yesterday tastes spectacle today. Noam stands at the edge with David, camera down by his chest, lens capped. The image that had been set where it should never stand gleams—metal and screens and a face that displays a thousand faces. The dais is draped in banners that say *HARMONY* in six scripts; the air says something else.

The man in linen that is not priestly steps forward—rings of security, a voice trained for microphones. Not the same liaison who stuttered last week. This one

smiles like a surgeon. The crowd learns his name quickly and forgets it as quickly. Noam doesn't write it down. He writes *the prophet* in his notebook and underlines it once.

"Peace by obedience," the man says softly, and the speakers make it large. "We harmonize worship and commerce, devotion and daily bread." He gestures to the image. "Behold: the sign of unity."

He lifts one hand. The sky obliges. Fire falls—not lightning jagged with weather, but a clean finger of flame that lands on a bronze plate and leaves it unscorched, the way a trick would if it weren't a trick. The crowd gasps—the honest kind first, then the curated kind supplied by the cameras. Noam feels the hair on his wrists stand. David's jaw tightens. "Not from the Lord," he says, quiet, not rattled. "But He warned us."

The prophet turns to the image and speaks words that are mostly vowels to Noam's ear. The image replies. Not a loop; not a pre-roll. It regards the crowd with a patient interest that feels like being inventoried. "Harmonize," it says in a voice generated to be trustworthy. "Swear allegiance; receive provision." Its eyelids move. Someone in front laughs and then covers his mouth, ashamed and thrilled.

The decree comes dressed like policy. A junior official reads it because tyrants love a civil servant's tone.

"Effective immediately: *Unified Identity* becomes *Sacred Trust*. Biometric—hand or forehead—linked to Central Wallet. Worship calendar harmonized.

Exemptions sunset in thirty days. Certified entities must screen for compliance. Noncompliance = suspension of movement, services, employment, and subsidies."

He swallows and continues. "A central number will anchor your identity across jurisdictions." His voice catches a little when he says *number*. The camera forgives him.

Security opens enrollment booths like kiosks for festival bracelets. The prophet extends his hands. People stream forward—some hungry, some persuaded, some relieved to stop deciding.

A tremor of refusal moves the other way—thin, and stubborn. A grandmother grips her psalm scroll. A young officer—Avi—keeps his baton low and his eyes wet. Noam memorizes hands again.

The prophet's gaze sweeps the square and finds the pockets of resistance as if briefed by an algorithm that learned to smell conscience. "Do not be afraid," he says, as if quoting an angel he doesn't serve. "This is mercy at scale."

The image blinks and says, "Devotion will be verified." Its lips don't move the way lips should. Noam's stomach turns. He lifts the camera once, takes a single still—proof for later—and caps it again. David's fingers touch his elbow. "Stand steady."

In DC/NY, Elena watches the feeds fork and merge—Brussels, Beijing, Jerusalem. Across the Global Compassion Framework site, language updates live: *Sacred Trust Enrollment* replaces *Harmony Index*

Pilot; a new FAQ answers questions nobody was allowed to ask.

Her charger hums. The map is pinned with the ten names like lanterns. She types a guidance sheet titled *When Worship Is Weaponized* and doesn't send it yet. The new directive propagates: *biometric or blocked*.

Her phone buzzes and windows open in sequence:

Noam: False prophet on-mic. Fire-on-demand. Image "speaks." Decree: worship + mark = wallet + services. Exemptions end in 30 days.
Elena: Received. Archive hard. Don't post. Water, headlamps, out routes.
Kerem: Corridors retitled "Sacred." Desk 7 briefed: exit bans for unmarked. We will sponsor until the teeth close.
Arun: Desk Four now hosting "Harmony rallies." Scanners moved to spigots.
Mariam: Hospital memo: scan-first becomes worship-first. Matron says: not here.
Dmitri: HR draft: pledge of alignment. "Do you believe?" boxes in corporate font.
Jia (relay): Copy shop prints verse slips faster. Enrollers at metro.

Elena underlines three tasks: move funds off-grid; seed paper instructions; route crates labeled *candlesticks*. She calls Queens; the deaconess with oak-forearms says, "We can move two tonight."

She writes a private note to the team titled *Forty-Two Months* and quotes the verse without commentary.

She adds: Obedience over cleverness. If you must choose, pick the hungry person in front of you.

In Istanbul, Kerem stands behind Ece at the freight office while the corridor officer reads a new script with the earnestness of a man who would like to keep his job and soul both.

“From today,” the officer says, tapping a tablet, “*Sacred Trust* lanes are open. Certified shipments get green. Uncertified—red or review.” He glances at Ece. “Sponsorships will affect your… reliability.”

Ece’s smile is as narrow as a blade. “Reliability for what?”

“For mercy,” Kerem answers for him, softly. He signs where the form tells him to and writes a note in his pocket: *We will not baptize corruption. We will carry children around it.*

In Delhi, under the banyan, Desk Four arrives with banners—*HARMONY CELEBRATION: JOIN YOUR NEIGHBORS*—and a portable scanner on a stand that looks like a lectern.

Arun watches the students read their script and decide not to clap. Pastor Mathew steps into the shade and lifts a hand. “We love our neighbors,” he says. “We worship the Lord.” The Desk Four supervisor hesitates—a familiar man with eyes that remember being rinsed after the stings. He doesn’t shut the barrels down today. He writes the names of three students on a clipboard and then scratches two of them out.

In Cairo, A memo arrives on hospital letterhead with worship language deniably absent and practically implied. *SCAN-FIRST* remains the line. The matron posts her own, hand-lettered: *EXCEPTIONS: CHILDREN, THE ELDERLY, ANYONE WHO NEEDS HELP*. She signs it with her name and stares the scanner down as if it were a junior nurse.

In Jerusalem, the line for the kiosks grows. Those who enroll emerge with damp eyes and steady voices, relief mixed with something that will make their sleep shallow later. Those who refuse become obvious by subtraction.

The prophet blesses the crowd with a gesture that looks almost priestly and isn't. "Devotion is dignity," he says. The image repeats it in six languages. A boy claps because everyone else does, and then stops with his hands half together, uncertain, looking at David instead. David kneels so his eyes are level. "The Lord sees," he says to the boy. "He will keep those who are His."

Avi, at the gate, lowers his baton and raises his eyes long enough for Noam to write his name again in the notebook they know will outlast servers. The grandmother with the psalm scroll presses the paper to her lips like a compass.

The prophet leaves the dais. The image remains and rotates its face toward a different section of the square, cataloging loyalty and dissent with the steady patience of a machine that learned to call itself holy.

Noam feels the wire tighten across the map—forty-two months drawn taut like a bowstring. He texts Elena one word: *Soon*.

She replies with three: *Shoes by door*.

David squeezes Noam's shoulder—light, anchor. "We stand where we're told," he says. "We flee when we're told. We worship only the Lord."

Noam nods. He takes one more still—hands, not faces. He caps the lens. The square hums with a new kind of worship that isn't. The Church hums with an older worship that is. And the day turns its face toward the hills.

33. Global Council, DC/NY (Mandate)

“He says, ‘Be still, and know that I am God;
I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted on the earth.’”
— Psalm 46:10 (NASB2020)

Elena watches the press in split-screen: Brussels at a dais, Beijing behind a glass smile. The phrase lands first in Europe—*Full Harmonization*—and then in China—*Unified Trust*—and then in the Council feed that aggregates both and calls it *Global Compassion Framework,* like a marketer who ran out of shame.

Bullet points crawl: Biometric + CBDC now mandatory for essential services. Social credit (“Harmony Index”) enabled. Non-compliance = disqualification from travel, subsidies, and employment in public and certified sectors. There’s a paragraph about conscience exemptions that reads like a dare.

Her chargers hum. Her map looks like a patient with too many IVs. She texts a single line to all ten: *Burst mode only. Expect blackouts/jamming. Choose people over posts.*

Dots return. Then fragments, like prayers thrown through a storm.

Noam: North ridge. Hills. Abomination stood. Moving.
Mariam: Generator holding. Hospital ordered to scan-first; matron says no.
Amal: Farm safe. Bridge shut again. Night run

planned.
Kerem: Scores live. Corridor unsafe. Sponsoring clinics quietly.
Lina: State eyes everywhere. We're ghosts; God isn't.
Yoni: Depot locked. Off-ledger steady. Water Captain promoted.
Dmitri: Questioned again. "Harmony Index" pushed to employers. Window prayers open.
Arash: Routes hot. Two families across. Patrols bored into mercy once; may not twice.
Arun: Video spread. Pastors taken. Laying low per orders.

Elena builds a triage grid in her head: who needs extraction and when; who needs money that can't be frozen; who needs words and who needs silence. She drafts a guidance sheet titled *When the Grid Lies—How to pass a checkpoint without selling your soul, how to meet without a feed, how to find the people who feed you without a scan.* She doesn't send it yet. The blackouts begin like a tide.

Her own feed wobbles, then holds. She calls a retired diplomat whose Rolodex survived three administrations and two divorces. "Humanitarian carve-outs?" she asks.

He sighs. "In theory. In practice, only for entities with very green checks."

"We are not green," she says.

"Stay gray," he advises, oddly pastoral. "Gray moves."

She meets with her Queens basement circle under a fluorescent saint of a light. They route the next crate

of “candlesticks,” smuggle a pediatric CPAP labelled *Processional Bellows*, and print pamphlets for immigrant congregations titled *How to Help Without a QR*. A deaconess with forearms like oaks says gently, “If they call this compassion, we will show them what compassion actually does.”

On the subway home, the ad for the Global Framework has been updated: *Love at Scale*. Her jaw tics. She prays Psalm 46 under her breath, not as a spell but as alignment—*God is our refuge and strength, a very ready help in trouble.* A man across the car catches the verse out of the air and nods once, like hands passing bread.

At her desk, she quickly writes private messages to each of the team members. The grid flickers. Her apartment falls dark. She breathes, still, and knows—He is God when screens glow; He is God when they don’t. She lights one actual candlestick from the last crate that passed a border by an angel’s distraction and prays each name by firelight.

Outside, sirens Doppler from one borough to another. Inside, her sat phone ticks once more. A burst from Noam: *Hills. With others. Two men on the ridge—voices like thunder and honey. Not yet close. Soon?* The message ends mid-letter. Jamming eats the rest.

Elena presses her palm to the map, to the pin over Jerusalem, to the space between promises and their appointments. “Keep them,” she says to the God who listens without bandwidth. “All of them. Keep them.”

34. Moscow (Designation)

“The name of the Lord is a strong tower;
The righteous runs into it and is safe.”
— Proverbs 18:10 (NASB2020)

It’s official now—paper on a door, digital on every dashboard: *EXTREMIST ORGANIZATION* stamped over the small house-church that sings like a kettle. The designation retro-dates, because of course it does. Dmitri reads the notice on the ministry site and tastes metal.

Galina summons a “contextualization meeting.” The team crafts language that says nothing and everything: *stability, order, and social cohesion*. Dmitri writes a sentence that is too honest and deletes it before the filter can light it red. He saves the sentence in *Light* and prints it for Irina’s flour tin.

At lunch, he walks the long block around the park. A van idles near the bench with the gum-like stone. The journalist who used to be loud and now is silent remains so; his period never becomes a word. Dmitri drops a scrap of bread. Pigeons approve of his theology.

The knock comes at dusk. Two men in not-quite-uniforms, tired and thorough. “Mr. Sokolov,” the taller says. “We have questions about your attendance at proscribed meetings.”

“Lawyers prefer I schedule such conversations,” Dmitri says gently.

“Bring your coat.”

Irina appears in the hallway with a scarf and a prayer disguised as scolding. “You will eat something when you return,” she says to Dmitri, then to the men, “He is thin because he works; do not keep him from his supper.” The taller one hides a smile and fails.

They ride in a car that smells like cigarettes and winter. The office is bright with the kind of light that interrogates. Questions start soft, then try to sharpen: *Who else attends? What do you say when you meet? Do you believe the state is ordained by God?* Dmitri answers like a man building a fence with truth and charity: small posts, straight lines, no spears.

“Do you have allegiance to any authority above the Council?” the shorter asks at last, as if the script finally admitted its point.

“Yes,” Dmitri says. “To God.”

The pen hovers. “Define obedience.”

“Loving my neighbor,” Dmitri says. “Telling the truth. Praying for those in authority. Refusing to lie for them.”

Silence stretches. The men are not villains; they are tired men tasked with sanding souls. The taller one glances at the clock, at the camera, at the folder with Dmitri’s name spelled correctly. “Your employer has enrolled in the Harmony Index,” he says finally. “Your score is… suboptimal. This may affect your position.”

“It may,” Dmitri agrees.

“You may be given a choice,” the shorter adds. “A public statement. Attendance at a recognized congregation. A demonstration of civic reliability.”

Dmitri thinks of windows open. He thinks of flour tins and psalms and Irina’s towel slap. He thinks of the strong tower that is not a building. “If I must choose,” he says kindly, “I will.”

They release him with a paper he will not sign. Outside, snow hesitates—flakes the size of commas. He walks home and does not check his phone until he’s under Irina’s lamp.

Dmitri: Designation official. Questioned. Choice coming: recant or job loss (worse?). I am peaceful. Pray for my friend who is still in custody.
Elena: With you. If work goes, we’ll make a way. Do not lie. Do not rage. Sing if you must.
Noam: From the hills—He is our tower.
Mariam: We hold you up like Aaron and Hur.
Kerem: Door open here if you need it.

The next morning, Volkova HR calls him in. The Harmony Index UI smiles like a dentist. “We’re piloting an internal covenant,” HR says. “Pledges to avoid extremist associations; statements of alignment with social cohesion. Sign, and your score improves.”

Dmitri reads it twice. The words are crafted to fit any throat. He hears Irina: *Be brave at least as often as you are clever*. He hears Jesus: *let your yes be yes*. He hears the journalist’s period.

“I can sign that I will love my neighbor, seek peace, and tell the truth,” he says. “I cannot sign that the state defines those words for me.”

Silence. Then the thing HR was waiting to say: “Then we must let you go.”

He nods. “Thank you for your honesty.”

He boxes his desk—plant (real), mug (cracked), books (not all approved). Galina comes as he is leaving, face carved in thin patience. “Why?” she asks, not sneering, just genuinely curious how a man chooses poverty.

“Because words mean things,” he says, and surprises himself with the simplicity.

On the street, the cold tastes like iron and clarity. He delivers the plant to Irina’s windowsill, the mug to her sink, and the books to the bottom shelf beside the Bible. He opens the flour tin, adds today’s printed truth, and prays out loud so his own ears will hear: “Name of the Lord, be my tower.”

His sat phone buzzes.

Dmitri: Job gone. Soul intact. God is my tower.
Yoni: Come help us fix pumps for a week. Wages: onions and joy.
Lina: Also tea. Libya brand.
Elena: We’ll stabilize you. Proud of you. Rest today. Sing if you can.

He sings. Quiet, tuneless, stubborn—under his breath while the kettle warms, while Irina complains about his boots leaving snow, while the city outside

advertises harmony and fails to sell it to the birds. He is not safe in any earthly sense. He is kept. And that is enough to begin the next obedience.

35. Istanbul (Exit Bans)

“It is better to take refuge in the Lord
Than to trust in people.
It is better to take refuge in the Lord
Than to trust in noblemen.”
— Psalm 118:8–9 (NASB2020)

The airport hums like a hive with bad manners. Kerem and Ece stand at the TrustScore queue where screens smile without blinking. The sign above the lanes used to say *Departures*; now it says *Certified Departures* and *Review Required*. The review line coils like a wounded snake.

“Family of four—Sudan corridor,” Ece murmurs, chin-tipping toward a couple with two little girls and three suitcases that know too much. “We sponsored their clinic. Exit request under our umbrella.”

“We keep them in green,” Kerem says, and hates the sentence for existing.

The kiosk chirps when the father scans. *REVIEW REQUIRED. PLEASE PROCEED TO DESK 7.* The mother’s scan stays green. The older girl’s wristband link flashes amber, then settles—child exemptions still work on Thursdays, apparently. The younger girl hugs a stuffed camel whose stitched smile refuses to be politicized.

Desk 7 is a young officer with a too-new uniform and a conscience still finding its voice. “Your sponsor?” he asks.

“Anatolia Aid & Culture,” Ece says, placing their packet on the counter like an offering. “Generator shipments. Clinic support. Corridor-certified.”

The officer scrolls through a terminal window that could decide eternity for a family and acts as if it’s a calendar. His jaw tightens. “Husband flagged for ‘misinformation adjacency.’”

“For what?” the mother asks, voice careful, English precise.

“Your clinic posted that it would treat all without upgrade,” the officer says, reading. “He shared the post.” He lowers his voice a degree. “Once.”

Kerem breathes a prayer that sounds like arithmetic: Lord, move one heart. He slides a letter across the counter—language Ece drafted about humanitarian protections, clauses in a corridor memo that nobody reads, a footer citing a Council directive’s footnote. The officer reads. His eyes move like a man trying to learn a new alphabet.

“Your civic sponsor accepts liability?” he asks.

“Yes,” Ece says, without looking at Kerem because she trusts him to nod. He does.

A supervisor appears, cologne first, clipboard second. “Problem?”

“Resolved,” the young officer says, and stamps the packet before the supervisor can confiscate the conversation. “Green lane.”

The father exhales a year. The mother says, “Thank you,” to nobody and everybody. The older girl salutes

the camel for courage; the camel remains professionally cheerful.

After they're gone, the supervisor lingers. "Your entity's reliability dipped," he says to Kerem, as conversational as poison. "Sponsorships affect your Harmony Index."

Kerem smiles without teeth. "So do babies breathing when generators run."

The supervisor's mouth twitches. "Be careful you don't become… miscalibrated."

"Calibration belongs to the One who made the scales," Kerem says, too softly to be a provocation, just loudly enough to keep his own spine straight.

On the tram back, Ece leans her head against the window. "We keep buying gray with our names," she says.

"We'll keep receipts that heaven approves," Kerem answers.

His sat phone buzzes.

Kerem: Airport a maze. Exit bans via Index. We got a family through. Our score dips; conscience stays. Pray for Desk 7 officer—mercy learning its words.
Elena: Well done. Keep sponsoring the small. If the system bites, we'll grow more gray routes.
Yoni: Our donkey says you're certified in compassion.
Noam: From the hills—He calibrates the scales.

That night, the café circle meets under the buzzing bulb. Hakan's pamphlet—*How to Get Help Without a*

QR—goes to print. Tía prays three sentences that sound like thunder in miniature: “Keep our hands clean. Keep our feet moving. Keep our love from shrinking.”

Kerem walks home across the bridge. A police boat prowls below like a thought you can’t shake. He leaves groceries at the widow’s door again, and adds a note: *The Lord sees*. Before sleep, he texts Ece: *Thank you for saying yes before my nod*. She replies with a dot, their shorthand for *seen*. He sleeps with the tram’s rhythm still in his bones and the airport’s hum refusing to follow him into dreams.

36. Addis Ababa (Euphrates News)

“The sixth angel poured out his bowl on the great river, the Euphrates; and its water was dried up, so that the way would be prepared for the kings from the east.”
— Revelation 16:12 (NASB2020)

The news arrives in fragments—drone shots of a riverbed like a spine, men walking where boats should bicker, captions arguing over dates and causes. Some say seasonal dams and drought; others say something older has reached its appointment.

In the Blue Nile yard, Yoni watches the video on Tesfaye’s phone. The screen throws harsh light on calloused palms. “If it is what it is,” Tesfaye says, “the world will pretend not to see until it can no longer pretend.”

“At the camp,” Yoni answers, “water still tastes like tin. Today’s obedience is the same.”

They load chlorine and dignity and head out. On the roadside, a kiosk blares a panel show debating whether prophecy belongs in logistics. A boy buys gum and doesn’t care. A woman reads Psalms to a sleeping baby out loud because she is allowed to.

At the camp, the Water Captain waits with a ledger she decorated with flowers and math. “We need four capfuls now,” she says gravely. “Children are clever and spill.” Yoni bows like she is a minister of a real government and hands her a replacement cap because he thought of that this morning, and God is kind.

A rumor slides through the tents: *river dry… kings coming… end near*. Fear rises with it, equal parts awe and fatalism. Yoni calls a meeting by the pump and keeps it short. “Whatever tomorrow brings,” he says, “today we love our neighbor. We fix the pump. We share bread. We tell the truth about Jesus. This doesn’t change.”

A militia jeep idles by the gate, men staring at phones. One points at the sky like the river’s absence is written there. The young one with the sandwich from last week chews more slowly. He catches Yoni’s eye, shrugs helplessly, and looks relieved when Yoni shrugs back like, *Yes, it’s big. Also, help me lift this bucket.*

They make a shade tunnel extension—old tarps, new rope, two poles that were once a fence. Children run through it whooping because tunnels are fun regardless of eschatology. Yoni laughs and feels his shoulders unclench.

His sat phone vibrates.

Yoni: Euphrates footage everywhere. Camp buzzing. Today’s obedience: water, bread, truth.
Noam: From the hills—He’s still our river.
Mariam: Babies breathing. A mother read Psalm 46 through the blackout.
Arash: Routes hot. We walk by lamp, not stadium lights.
Elena: Exactly. Don’t let headlines steal your hands.

Afternoon clouds boil up and refuse to rain. A pastor from the neighborhood brings a sack of onions and a

quiet word: “If the river dries, the Lord is still wet with mercy.” Yoni grins at the phrase. He gives the pastor a bar of soap wrapped in notebook paper and writes *THEOLOGY* across it because it makes the children laugh.

At dusk, he and Tesfaye sit on the tailgate with plates of *shiro* and *injera*. They watch the camp settle like a big animal folding its legs. “When kings come,” Tesfaye says, “they will still need clean water.”

“They will,” Yoni agrees. “We’ll charge them extra.”

They laugh softly. Before sleep, Yoni texts Amal a picture of the Water Captain scolding a teenager for wasting chlorine. Amal replies with a photo of the boy with the soda-tab bracelet, smiling. The world is big and on fire; also, two children are learning stewardship. Yoni sleeps like a man held in a promise older than rivers.

Act IV: Great Tribulation (Days ~1,261 → ~2,400)

37. Beijing (Witness)

“And they overcame him because of the blood of the Lamb and because of the word of their testimony, and they did not love their life even when faced with death.”
— Revelation 12:11 (NASB2020)

The text arrives at noon. *Auntie Mei—transfer to Municipal People’s Court. 14:00.* No hearing announced; no charges posted. The copy shop girl with ink on her hands writes the address on a slip of paper and tucks it into Jia’s palm like contraband courage.

“Don’t go,” Chen says, which means Please don’t be hurt where I can’t help you.

“I’ll go where I’m told,” Jia answers. She means the Lord, not the state.

The court corridor smells like formaldehyde and fear. Families clutch papers that say nothing. Guards carry calm like a weapon. Jia stands with a bag of food she knows they won’t take and a psalm in her throat she knows they can’t take.

Auntie Mei shuffles past between two officers. Her hair is thinner; her eyes are not. They meet Jia’s and in that instant an entire house-church service takes place without words—confession, assurance, a hymn. Mei smiles, small and defiantly, and Jia realizes she has already decided what kind of day this is.

They don't let Jia into the room. She listens through the wall to the cadence of proceedings that never intended to be just. Words like *social harm* and *subversion* bump into Mei's answers like moths against glass. Then silence. Then footsteps. Then gone.

Evening. Stairwell church. They meet in the smell of cabbage and soap and courage. Songs low. Prayer like mortar between bricks. Someone knocks the pattern; then, too quickly, the wrong rhythm follows. The door splinters in one kick.

"Stay," Jia says to her own fear. She stands. The room fills with officers who will later swear they were gentle and know they weren't. Chen moves toward her, and she shakes her head. He obeys. It is the bravest thing he has ever done.

"Jia Li," the lead officer says, reading, mispronouncing, not caring. "You are detained for processing."

"For singing?" she asks, simply.

"For disrupting social harmony."

She smiles, and in the smile is all the foolishness and all the wisdom she has: "Harmony needs truth."

They take her to a room that is bored of itself—a table, two chairs, camera eye red and patient. The questions start with familiar associations, foreign ties, and funds that never existed. She answers carefully, truthfully, without offering easy hooks. The lead grows frustrated. The second—young, jaw tight—watches her

like a student who knows the right answer and hates it.

“Sing,” the lead says suddenly, mocking. “Your friends say you sing. Let me hear harmony.”

Jia closes her eyes. She thinks she will sing Psalm 27, but a different song pushes forward—the hymn from Auntie Mei’s sink baptisms. *“Be Thou my vision…”* Her voice fills the corners without touching the edges. The young officer blinks too quickly. The camera does not blink at all.

“Enough,” the lead snaps. He leans in close enough for her to smell peppermints. “You will sign a statement of alignment with the Harmony Index. You will name your associates. You will stop meeting illegally. You will stop singing.”

“I can sign that I will love my neighbors and tell the truth,” she says softly. “I cannot sign that the Council defines those words.”

He laughs without humor. “Then you will disappear.”

She thinks of Elena’s message: *Either answer okay*. She thinks of the van she didn’t take and the two who did. She thinks of Auntie Mei smiling like a lamp. She thinks of Jesus, who did not love His life even unto death. She answers without heat: “I won’t disappear to Him.”

They move faster after that. Paper she won’t sign. Hands she won’t fight. A corridor that invents extra corners. A door that closes with the finality of a lid.

In the cell, fluorescent light makes everything crueler than it has to be. A woman on the next cot stares without looking. Jia sits, back straight, palms open on her knees. She prays for Chen to be wise, for the copy shop girl to keep her ink, for the young officer to stop blinking so hard when truth walks into his day.

Hours unmannerly themselves into the night. Footsteps choose her door. They bring her to a different room—no camera, only a table and the sound of her own pulse. The second officer—the young one—stands there with a face like a storm that can't decide. Behind him, the lead watches, bored again.

"Final time," the lead says. "Align or suffer."

Jia hears another voice layered under his—ancient, kind, unstoppable. She speaks to that voice and lets the others eavesdrop: "Jesus, keep me."

She starts to sing, low, so even her fear can hear it. *"I have decided to follow Jesus…"* The young officer's mouth tightens; he looks at the floor. The lead nods. The blow is efficient, trained, meant to end and not to teach. The room tilts. She tastes iron. She falls like a prayer.

She does not feel the second strike. She is already busy—remembering faces, handing them to the Lord. Amal at the bridge. Mariam with the babies. Yoni with chlorine math. Kerem at Desk 7. Dmitri with his flour tin. Lina in alleys. Arash on the road by the pomegranates. Arun on the wall with a scarf. Noam on

the ridge with David and the drum in the stones. Elena under a candle, saying names.

The hymn finishes in a voice not hers.

In the stairwell, the house-church learns at midnight. The copy shop girl writes *JIA* on a slip and tucks it in her shoe. Chen goes to the window, opens it a hand's width, and sings the verse she chose, quiet enough to be an act of war and an act of love at once.

The sat thread blips once in the safe window.

Elena: Confirm.
Copy Shop (through a friend): She is with Jesus.
Noam: We weep, and we worship.
Mariam: Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of His godly ones.
Arun: We will tell her story.
Dmitri: We will not waste her witness.
Kerem: We carry children around corruption; God carried her around death into life.
Yoni: We will name a pump "Jia."
Arash: We will keep the road.

Elena lights a second candle. In Beijing, a young officer sits alone and stares at his hands, and does not sleep. In a stairwell, a song refuses to die. And in a Kingdom that does not require a Council, a daughter steps into a light that needs no electricity and hears the voice she obeyed all along say, *Well done.*

38. Trumpet Two (Sea Struck)

“The second angel sounded, and something like a great mountain burning with fire was hurled into the sea; and a third of the sea became blood, and a third of the creatures which were in the sea and had life died; and a third of the ships were destroyed.”
— Revelation 8:8–9 (NASB2020)

The sea changes color before the city admits it. Lina sees it first from the rooftop where the safehouse used to be a door and is now a memory: a bruise spreads beneath the morning glare, brown-red swirls like old wine and rust, the surface pocked with bubbles that don’t belong. A siren barks, confused, then decides to mean it.

Yusuf calls from the port road. “Coast Guard all out. Militia—state—who can tell—closing the gate. Smell that?”

She smells it: iron and fish and something like a battery forgotten in the sun. Her drone lifts into a sky that has learned to be cautious. At two hundred meters, the view sharpens: a burn zone offshore, smoke braided with steam; a hulking thing on the horizon listing, skin peeled back, containers yawning. Then farther—patches of sea stippled with pale bodies, fish turning wrong side up, slicks of crimson in windrows.

She sends a low-res feed to Elena and a full-res feed to the encrypted archive. No caption yet—truth doesn’t need adjectives.

Down at the quay, arguments become policy. A port officer waves a megaphone like a wand. “Certified cargo only!” he shouts, as if the sea consults his spreadsheet. Mothers press forward with coolers for insulin that will warm into uselessness by noon. Men from the tuna boats stare at the water as if it betrayed them.

“Lina,” Yusuf says, tugging her sleeve. “State wants the quay cleared. They’ll make examples.”

“Then we become exceptions first,” she answers. “Clinic drop, alley route.”

They shoulder the cooler and the backpack clinic, V-shaped through a crowd that doesn’t know where to point its anger. The first checkpoint blocks the alley that never mattered until it did. “Papers,” the officer says, eyes on the cooler.

“Medical,” Lina answers. “Children.”

He hesitates. The wind changes, and everyone gets a mouthful of copper. Somewhere beyond the breakwater, a ship’s horn wails, long and low, then cuts off too fast. The officer lifts the tape, just this once. “Go,” he murmurs. “Quickly.”

At the cardiology annex, the generator coughs and catches; the nurse at the door smells like sleep lost. “We have seven on insulin,” she says. “Three are already shaky.”

Lina transfers vials into a fridge that looks like piety. She checks a boy’s blood sugar and sings a line of a hymn under her breath because rhythm steadies hands. The boy’s mother asks, “Is the sea poisoned?”

Lina doesn't lie. "Today, yes." The woman nods once, a widow accepting the weather.

Her sat phone vibrates in the safe window.

Lina: Sea turned—die-off near breakwater; ship burning farther out. Port closing. Insulin delivered. Routing by alleys.
Elena: Archive first, posts later. Prioritize the cold chain. "Great mountain" language noted.
Kerem: Straits locking down. Security corridor = knife. Istanbul running land routes while sea seizes.
Mariam: If your cold chain fails, Cairo can receive two pediatric cases. God keep you.

By late morning, rumors calcify: an undersea detonation; a reactor loop in a ship's belly; volcanic ejecta from a seam the maps forgot; a falling thing that decided on water instead of earth. The foam doesn't care who gets the verb tense right. Fish keep dying. Two freighters limp for the channel, and one doesn't make it—tilts, coughs flame, folds in place like a man sitting down too fast. Phones catch the column of smoke; Lina catches the angle of two deckhands jumping and hopes the water is kinder than it looks.

Afternoon turns mean. The state declares the quay a military zone. A masked crew moves like punctuation at the end of sentences. A trader throws a bottle—aimlessly—and pays with his cheekbone. Lina tucks the drone low and gets one more pass: red slicks streaked by wakes, flotsam like gravestones, a diagonal of containers bobbing away from a ship as if they were ashamed of the parent that dropped them.

She lands on a rooftop chicken coop. The birds complain like critics; she apologizes, meaning it.

“The clinic wants another run,” Yusuf says, face gray with salt and news. “Two infants, one freezer unit we can’t trust past sundown.”

“Go now,” she says. “Before state eyes learn our route.”

They cut through the *wadi*, shoes skidding on gravel slicked by spray. In the second alley, a teenager in a black mask steps out with the posture of a checkpoint. “We need your cooler,” he says, too loudly.

“You can have my bag,” Lina says, too calm. “Take it. Sell the gauze. Throw away the Bibles. But the cooler goes to babies. God will ask you about it.”

He blinks at the mention of *God*, an unbudgeted noun. Yusuf sets the bag down. The boy kicks it once, like he has to perform, then jerks his chin aside. “Go.”

At the clinic, the freezer sighs into a better hum when the generator load balances. Lina exhales too. A mother presses her forehead to the cooler like it’s a relic, then laughs at herself for believing in boxes. “I still believe in God more,” she promises, as if God required the clarification.

On the way back, they climb to the roof again because it has become a pulpit. The sea looks sicker. Birds circle and refuse to land. Along the seawall, men with nets stare at red creases and do not cast. A patrol boat cuts water too close to the oil; its wake flares into flame for a second like the sea remembered a different covenant.

Her sat phone pings.

Kerem: Istanbul: straits shut to uncertified; ‘debris risk.’ Aid ships stacked. We’re pivoting to rail + truck.
Lina: Tripoli: port militarized; alley medicine holds. Sea bleeding.
Elena: Hold. Sleep away from patterns tonight. Document mercy more than grief where you can.

At dusk, the smell changes again—less blood, more acid. Lina thinks of Exodus, of rivers that turned and men who argued about reasons. She prays without arguments: for the deckhands, for the boy with the mask, for the officer who lifted the tape, for the mothers whose coolers are too small.

Night. The city hums like a ship’s engine through the walls. Lina sleeps with her shoes by the threshold and the drone case under her hand. The sea outside has learned a new color, and the chapter in which men learn new mercy begins, whether they want it to or not.

39. Sea Strike Fallout (Tripoli / Istanbul)

“He caused the storm to be still,
So that the waves of the sea were hushed.”
— Psalm 107:29 (NASB2020)

In Tripoli, the smell lingers—iron, diesel, something that tastes like lightning. Lina moves insulin like contraband, a soft cooler tucked under a shawl, Yusuf walking two paces behind with the backpack clinic, and the expression of a man who has learned to look boring.

The port gate wears new teeth—concertina wire and a billboard that says *MILITARY ZONE,* the way weather says *storm*. A masked officer checks papers, then checks the sea, as if it might apologize. “Certified lanes only,” he recites, eyes on the cooler.

“We’re rerouting,” Lina answers. “Alley clinic, then cardiology.”

A row of tuna boats lists at odd angles, nets hanging like tired lungs. Fish float where fish should not be; boys with poles stand with empty buckets because their mothers told them to keep routine even when routine won’t come. Lina wants to cry or to shout; she chooses to knock softly on a door where a baby’s freezer hums like faith. The mother lets out a breath when the vials click into place. “You came,” she says, surprised by grace.

Back in the alley, a teen in a scarf points his phone at the water. “It’s red again,” he says. “They say volcano. They say bomb. They say God.”

“What do you say?” Lina asks.

He shrugs like a boy who won’t be tricked into a fight. “I say the fish died.”

They cut across the *wadi*, shoes crunching on grit. A patrol stops them—state uniforms, boots clean, fear hiding in posture. “Curfew moved up,” the lieutenant says. “Nineteen hundred.”

“We’ll be done by eighteen,” Yusuf promises. Lina nods because promise and plan are closer cousins now than ever. The lieutenant steps aside. His hand twitches toward the cooler and away again, like temptation remembered it has a mother.

Her sat phone buzzes.

Lina: Port militarized. Curfew tighter. Cold chain holding (barely). Two infant drops done; cardiology next.
Elena: Rotate routes. No patterns two days in a row. Archive sea footage off-grid only.
Mariam: If you need to move two infants to Cairo, say the word.
Kerem: Straits: green lanes weaponized. We’re sending by rail to Edirne, then south by trucks.

In Istanbul, Kerem stands in a rail yard that smells like oil and problem-solving. Ece reads manifests; Mustafa argues with a forklift that behaves like a donkey. The new sign on the freight office door reads *PRIORITY: CERTIFIED HUMANITARIAN GOODS*; the app translates that as *Friends of the Council first*.

“Two pallets of bottled water, four pallets of filters, one crate of candlesticks,” Ece lists. “To Tripoli, first leg by rail to the border depot.”

“Assuming customs lets compassion be a commodity,” Kerem mutters. Ece doesn’t smile; she is counting QR codes and deciding which to cover with their own.

The corridor officer arrives with a clipboard and an aura. “TrustScore for Anatolia Aid has dipped,” he says conversationally. “Sponsoring uncertified clinics does that.” He taps one of the seals. “This crate is… unsubtle.”

“Liturgical supplies,” Ece deadpans. “For a procession of mercy.”

The officer’s mouth betrays a nearly-smile. “Fine. But you will sign a liability transfer.”

“We already did,” Kerem says. “In our souls.” He signs the paper, because paper eats time and time buys lives.

They load at dusk. A siren stutters somewhere down by the straits; the city flinches, then pretends it didn’t. Mustafa climbs into the cab, sunflower seeds rattling in his pocket like courage. “Tomorrow I drive south,” he says. “If gates close, I find keys.”

Kerem’s sat phone trembles.

Kerem: Rail pivot is live. Water/filters/candlesticks are moving. Corridor teeth out; humor helps. Pray for Desk 7 officer and a border captain with mercy.
Elena: Noted. Keep receipts heaven approves. Sleep

before midnight—curfew sweeps are rough tonight.
Lina: God bless your “candlesticks.” The babies do.

Night scrapes along the Bosphorus like a ship hull against stone. In Tripoli, Lina sleeps with the drone case under her hand in a flat that looks like no one lives there. In Istanbul, Kerem leaves groceries at the widow’s door and adds a note: *The Lord hushes storms*. He doesn’t believe the sea yet; he believes the Lord.

40. Trumpet Three (“Wormwood”)

“The third angel sounded, and a great star fell from heaven, burning like a torch, and it fell on a third of the rivers and on the springs of waters. The name of the star is called Wormwood; and a third of the waters became wormwood, and many people died from the waters, because they were made bitter.”
— Revelation 8:10–11 (NASB2020)

In Addis Ababa, the first hint is taste. Yoni drinks from a tap he knows by mouth feel—tin, a little earth, a trace of chlorine. Today it bites back—metallic, pine-bitter. He spits into the dust and does the arithmetic: upstream spill? New algae bloom after the fires? Ash-fall leaching into springs?

At the depot, the *UNIFIED ACCESS* tablet smiles and refuses another release. He doesn’t argue with the screen; he argues with reality. Rope, soap, and filters —off-ledger again. Tesfaye sniffs the water he boiled for coffee and swears in velvet. “Bitter.”

At the camp, the Water Captain meets him with a ledger and a scowl older than twelve. “Children are complaining,” she reports. “It tastes like medicine without healing.”

They test with strips and a field kit scavenged from three NGOs ago. Nitrates spike. A glow of something they can’t name bleeds into the blue. Yoni files the results in a folder titled *Wormwood?* and prays out loud, because sometimes naming the fear steals its appetite.

He gathers the people by the pump. “Boil longer,” he says. “Four minutes. Filter through cloth, then through these buckets with sand and charcoal. Chlorine—yes—but capful math changes. We’ll train you.” He meets eyes, one by one. “If a child complains of stomach fire, come. Don’t be brave; be honest.”

A militia jeep stalls by the gate; men chew seeds and push rumors. *Star fell. Torch in the sky. Bitter springs.* Yoni keeps his voice small and exact. “Today, we fix our water.” He teams people in pairs: Water Captain with the widower who lost his sense of taste; two teenagers with biceps and no patience; a grandmother who remembers when wells were stories. Sand, gravel, cloth, tabs—his liturgy for a poisoned world.

His sat phone vibrates.

Yoni: Waters turning—taste + strips ugly. Off-ledger filters; training capful math 2.0. Many complain of “pine-bitter.” Naming the folder “Wormwood” and praying it’s just the folder.
Elena: Focus on practicals. Archive data + symptoms. Avoid posting causation. Mercy first.
Mariam: Cairo reports odd taste in neighborhoods with shallow wells. Hospital boiling protocols updated.
Kerem: Istanbul taps taste like coins. City blames “temporary upstream anomalies.” We’re shipping bottled water to clinics.

By afternoon, three children vomit; one shakes. The volunteer nurse frowns at the strip and the child and chooses the child. “Charcoal slurry,” she says. “Slow.”

The mother watches every swallow like an exam. Yoni lays a hand on the boy's hair and feels heat that scares him. He prays quietly.

A government truck rattles by with loudspeakers that say the right words badly: *Do not drink unverified sources. Report bitterness to the Harmony line.* No number is given. A man yells back, "We are the line," and laughter breaks something before fear mends it.

At dusk, the pump's shadow stretches long and weird. Yoni adds a second layer of cloth to the filter and an extra scoop of charcoal to the bucket. The Water Captain writes the change into her ledger with flowers around it so people will look.

"We'll make it through," Yoni tells Tesfaye. Tesfaye nods, then, under his breath, "God keep our kidneys."

In Delhi, Arun tastes it too. The campus spigot under the banyan turns bitter—like aspirin dissolved in old coins. Students line up with bottles; Desk Four agents "assist" with new scanners that claim to verify potability. The sign says *SAFE WATER = UPGRADE*. A boy with a sunburn jokes, then doesn't.

Arun drags in two blue barrels donated by a church in Karol Bagh—sand, gravel, charcoal, cloth. "Gravity is still allowed," he tells the students, and shows them how clean looks before it tastes clean. Desk Four watches, undecided if this is subversion or free labor.

Pastor Mathew arrives with two kettles and a psalm: *He turns bitter water sweet.* He means Moses; he means now. They rig a burn ring from bricks and boil

in batches while the banyan gives shade like an old aunt.

A Desk Four agent approaches with the face of a man sent to fetch a cat that bites. “Community filtration is commendable,” he says. “For certified people.”

Arun hands him a cup from the boiled barrel. “Drink first,” he suggests, “then decide who qualifies.” The agent eyes the cup, sips. His face betrays relief before his training catches up. He fails to confiscate the barrels. He hates himself for failing. He does not shut them down.

Arun’s sat phone vibrates in the window.

Arun: Banyan spigot bitter. Boil + charcoal + sand. Desk Four circling, not pouncing. Students are filtering for anyone who comes.
Elena: Good. Keep windows small. Don’t travel alone after dusk. Document symptoms + recipes in paper notebooks.
Yoni: Capful math is working here too. Wormwood folder named; God over the name.

Night in Addis brings a breeze that smells like dust and a hint of pine and something the strips don’t name. Night in Delhi brings students telling jokes too loudly in the dark because laughter is more comforting to share than fear. Across both cities, the Church lights kitchens, not stages. Water drips through charcoal, as slow as patience, and the God who sweetened bitter once does not object to doing it with sand and buckets and stubborn hands.

41. Wormwood Spreads (Addis / Delhi)

“Then he cried out to the Lord, and the Lord showed him a tree; and he threw it into the waters, and the waters became sweet.”
— Exodus 15:25a (NASB2020)

In Addis Ababa, bitterness lingers on the tongue and the strip. Yoni rubs charcoal between his fingers like a sacrament that stains. “We add a second layer,” he tells the Water Captain. “Thicker cloth. Slow is our friend.”

She copies the change in her ledger with flowers that make men read. A grandmother asks if boiling longer makes the water angry. “It makes it safer,” Yoni says, and the small laugh that follows is worth a page of policy.

A government truck rolls by with a banner—*REPORT BITTERNESS TO HARMONY LINE*—and again, no number. The men in the back stare at the pump the way cats watch a fish tank. Tesfaye offers them cups of boiled water; habit makes them refuse; thirst makes them drink. One coughs. “Better,” he admits, as if it costs him a rank.

A boy vomits after sneaking a sip from a shallow ditch. The volunteer nurse moves like rain over a fire—charcoal slurry, slow sips, a hand on the forehead narrating the fever back down. Yoni prays *Lord, keep kidneys* under his breath like a metronome. He adds a new poster to the shade pole: *SPIT IT OUT IF IT’S BITTER. GOD WILL NOT BE OFFENDED.*

The depot still smiles the wrong way: *UNIFIED ACCESS ONLY*. Off-ledger again—rope for maize, filters for caps, a donkey for gratitude. Father Yohannes blesses both the donkey and the men who borrow it. “The Lord sweetened water with wood once,” he says. “Today, with charcoal and stubbornness.”

Yoni’s sat phone buzzes.

Yoni: Bitter holding. Two cases stabilized. Second-layer cloth + extra charcoal. Off-ledger steady. “Spit it out” poster working.
Elena: Perfect. Write the recipes on paper; send duplicates to three houses. Avoid centralized lists.
Mariam: Taste odd here too; hospital boiling rules tightened. Mothers are more compliant than officials.

In Delhi, Desk Four arrives to “assist” and discovers an economy of buckets. Under the banyan, students boil water in batches; Pastor Mathew quotes Moses without winning style points and wins anyway. The sign at the spigot says *FREE WATER—NO SCAN*; a smaller sign under it says *WE WILL TEACH YOU*.

A Desk Four supervisor frowns at the charcoal barrels. “Uncertified apparatus,” he declares.

“Gravity is certified by God,” Arun answers, too tired to be witty, just true. He hands the man a cup of boiled water. The supervisor drinks and forgets to scowl. “We will provide approved tablets tomorrow,” he promises. “Certified.”

“Bring them,” Arun says. “We’ll use both.”

Two students faint in the line—from heat and fear, not lack of food. The church women deploy *samosas* like tactics; the men rig a second ring of bricks for more boiling. An elderly Sikh gentleman arrives with a brass *lota* and two grandsons who stare at the steam like magic. “We are neighbors,” he says simply. Arun grins. “Yes.”

At dusk, the rumor mill tries a new product: *bitter means disloyal*. A boy parrots it; a girl glares him into silence. “God cares more for stomachs than slogans,” she says. Desk Four pretends not to hear.

Arun’s sat phone thrums.

Arun: Banyan becomes school. Boil/charcoal line steady. Desk Four tried to shut us; drank instead. Tablets promised tomorrow.
Elena: Good. Sleep with friends tonight. Avoid walking home alone. Keep paper logs—symptoms, recipes, names anonymized.

Night arrives with an exhausted grace. In Addis, the donkey snorts like an *amen*. In Delhi, the banyan shadows hold heat longer than they should. Water slides through charcoal, as slow as mercy, and the God who showed Moses a tree does not mind using barrels and stubborn students to do the same work.

42. Trumpet Four (Lights Darkened)

“The fourth angel sounded, and a third of the sun, a third of the moon, and a third of the stars were struck, so that a third of them would be darkened and the day would not shine for a third of it, and the night in the same way.”
— Revelation 8:12 (NASB2020)

In Israel, noon arrives and it looks like late afternoon. The city wears a filter no one asked for—sun thinned to brass, shadows with torn edges. People check their phones as if brightness were a setting they can restore. Noam checks his lens and finds the world underexposed by the environment, not a dial.

On the ridge, evacuees knit themselves into lines of meaning. David moves among them—water here, blankets there, a prayer like a hand on a shoulder. Noam frames a shot of faces turned to the sky, not in worship but in measurement. A shepherd holds up his watch and shrugs; time disagrees with light today.

Down in the city, the altar’s smoke looks sullen, like even fire is tired of being asked to prove itself. Drones fly lower and lack confidence. The junior official who lost his wobble gains it again when the microphones show him in grayscale.

Noam’s sat phone trembles.

Elena: Reports of global dimming + grid instability. Archive, don’t post. Expect nav failures. Keep water + headlamps. “Woe” follows—Rev 8:13.

Noam: Light down a third. People unsettled. We keep moving north. Filming for memory, not feeds.

As the day dims, the city sounds wrong—traffic noise soft, footsteps amplified, voices pitched higher as if light moderates tone. A woman hands Noam a bag of dried figs without looking at his face. “For later,” she says. He adds it to the pack and wonders what later means if today refuses to end when it should.

A child points. On a distant ridge, two figures stand where the grass meets the wind. Their outlines waver in the thinned light, like heat shiver without heat. David follows the child’s finger, nods once, and does not explain. “Soon,” he says again, and it feels like a word made of stone and honey.

As dusk pretends to arrive early, the cry comes not from a man but from the sky itself—something like an eagle, something like an angel, a sound that carries meaning even if the ears refuse vocabulary. Noam’s skin prickles. He doesn’t capture it—sound isn’t behaving, and some things you don’t trap in silicon. He writes it down later in a notebook: *Woe announced. Three times.* He underlines *three* and stares at the line until it stops moving.

In Cairo, the NICU’s daylight panels, already stingy, go muddy by mid-afternoon. The generator picks up the shrug from the grid and pretends it’s a relay race. Mariam cycles headlamps, tapes glow sticks to the IV poles, and arranges a string of cheap LEDs like a Christmas tree that doesn’t apologize. The babies don’t care about aesthetics; they care that the beep keeps time.

The corridor outside grows crowded with people who fear stairs in the dark. A clerk tapes *STAY CALM* on the wall and then takes it down because the letters look like a yell at half-light. A mother hums a song out of key and makes the room feel right.

“Storm?” a father asks.

“The sky has a cold,” the maintenance tech says. He means aerosol. He means ash. He means a third—Mariam hears Elena’s note in her head like a shared brain. She does not offer reasons; she offers sandwiches she shouldn’t have. The matron, catching her, pretends not to and hands her another tray. “We will blame generosity together,” she says.

At five p.m., it looks like seven; at seven, it looks like a power outage in the soul. The call to prayer drifts, strange and hollow. The city’s edges blur; men miss curbs and arguments because depth goes on strike.

Her sat phone buzzes.

Mariam: Light down by a third. Panels useless. We’re stringing LEDs + glow sticks. Mothers steady; staff steadier.
Elena: Perfect. Keep batteries rotating. Don’t let anyone ride elevators. Watch for navigation mishaps at entrances.
Yoni: Addis the same—sun tired. Filters working by feel. Kids make shadow puppets because they’re braver than we are.
Kerem: Istanbul dim. Harbor closed. Headlamps on. We move like moles.

A man stumbles at the ward door and stops, crying from embarrassment more than pain. Mariam kneels, cleans a scraped palm, and gives him directions using landmarks that don't need light: "Follow the smell of coffee; turn when you hear the violin from the stairwell."

He laughs, surprised by the idea that a violin is a compass. It is. A volunteer starts playing near the landing, and the building's fear lessens as it remembers it has a melody.

Night arrives, then arrives again. Noam writes *woe* three times in his notebook and circles it. Mariam tapes a verse to the nurse station: *The Lord is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear?* A boy in the waiting room copies it in shaky letters. The generator hums. The city breathes shallowly, and then deeper.

Across the thread, a handful of words make a small constellation:

Noam: Woe announced. Three.
Mariam: Glow sticks and grace.
Elena: Hold your positions. Eat real food. Sleep in pairs. Next trumpet soon.

The stars look fewer because they are. The moon is a coin with a bite taken out. Men fumble for switches that never controlled the sky. The Church lights candles that the Council forgot to regulate. And somewhere an eagle or an angel or a voice older than electricity warns in a tone that is both mercy and

alarm, and those with ears do not pretend they didn't hear.

43. “Woe, Woe, Woe” (Jerusalem /Cairo/ Tehran)

“Then I looked, and I heard an eagle flying in midheaven, saying with a loud voice, ‘Woe, woe, woe to those who live on the earth, because of the remaining blasts of the trumpet…’”
— Revelation 8:13 (NASB2020)

Outside Jerusalem, the day feels understaffed. Noam walks with the evacuees along the north ridge; the grass is the color of old brass, the shadows torn thin. Children ask when the sun forgot its job. David answers with water and a verse rather than explanations: *The Lord is my light*. Noam films hands, not horizons—hands passing figs, tying shoes, steadying knees. In the thinned sky, a shape crosses—bird or more—and his skin knows what his lens cannot settle: three woes announced, like stamps on the day.

A rumor runs the ridge: the two men have been seen on the far hill, voices like thunder and honey. David smiles without indulging curiosity. “When it’s time,” he says. “Keep moving.”

Noam’s sat phone, stingy with signal, manages a line.

Noam: Light still low. Woe announced—heard in the bones. Moving north. We can feel something coming.
Elena: Hold positions. Expect new kinds of pressure. Keep your shoes by the door.

In Cairo, the hospital receives a memo that reads like a dare: *SCAN-FIRST POLICY NOW MANDATORY*

FOR ALL ENTRY—HARMONY ID REQUIRED. EXCEPTIONS BY AUTHORIZED SUPERVISOR ONLY. The matron holds it between two fingers as if it smells. “Our authorization is mercy,” she says, and pins the memo to the cork board under the verse from Psalm 27 like Scripture outranks stationery.

Tension grows a shape in the lobby: two lines—*GREEN* and *EVERYONE*—and the guard trying to keep them from becoming a knot. A man in a suit points at the sign, and at his badge, and at the sky as if all three are related. “Order saves lives,” he says loudly.

“People save lives,” Mariam answers, not louder, more specific. She ushers a grandmother past the scanner and into the ward with the authority of a woman who will repent later if necessary and has no plans to. The clerk who hates his job and himself for hating it looks relieved when she does.

Outside, the dim light makes the steps treacherous. The maintenance tech tapes glow strips on the risers and rigs a string of LEDs from the ceiling fan. “Harmony can scan my toolbox,” he mutters. “It can’t fix a cracked stair.”

Mariam’s sat phone ticks.

Mariam: New scan-first order. We’re ignoring it (wisely). Lobby tense; stairway lit. Babies breathing. Woe felt like a wind.
Elena: Stand with the matron. Document denials quietly. Don’t post. Keep your exceptions list on paper.

In Tehran, Arash studies a new poster at the metro entrance: *HARMONY INDEX PHASE II—CIVIC RELIABILITY ENFORCEMENT*. Below, smaller: *Transport access tied to compliance*. The turnstiles blink a new red that feels personal. A woman argues with a scanner; the scanner wins. Two students try to help; Desk agents arrive like punctuation.

Hossein texts a time and a bread emoji. Arash detours through the bakery's side door, where the radio pretends to be broken and keeps secrets. "Routes are hotter," Hossein says. "Men are bored less often. Dogs bark sooner."

"Then we move softer," Arash answers. He traces a map with his finger. "Is the swallow way still open?"

"For now." Hossein looks past Arash at the poster through the window. "They are building a cage and calling it a hymn."

The clinic pilot expands its demands—scan to enter, scan to receive prescriptions. They would scan to breathe if they could figure out how. Arash watches a mother hand the clerk a photo of her child instead of a code; the clerk breaks and waves her through because he still remembers what a child is. "Bless you," Arash says as she passes. She nods like someone who ran out of words yesterday.

His sat phone vibrates.

Arash: Harmony Phase II is live—transport tied to compliance. Routes still open, tighter. Woe feels like pressure in the air. We keep moving people.

Elena: Limit trips. Pair up. Cache water + food along routes. Keep the compressor charged.

Night leans in early over three cities. In Jerusalem, Noam again writes *woe* three times and underlines them until the paper thins. In Cairo, the matron posts a second memo under the first: *EXCEPTIONS: CHILDREN, THE ELDERLY, ANYONE WHO NEEDS HELP,* and signs it with her own name like a psalm. In Tehran, Arash tapes a small arrow under a poster—pointing not to the scanner but to the alley that becomes a road for those who won't scan.

Somewhere, the eagle—or the angel—circles again. Three woes hang over the map like weather systems, and everyone who belongs to Jesus sets their hands to the next obedience they can reach before the wind changes shape.

44. Trumpet Five (Abyss)

“Then out of the smoke came locusts upon the earth… and power was given them, as the scorpions of the earth have power… And in those days people will seek death and will not find it; they will long to die and death flees from them.”
— Revelation 9:3, 6 (NASB2020)

In Tehran, the first swarm sounds like anger given wings. Arash looks up from the bakery alley at a cloud that isn’t weather—black motes knitting and unknotting, the city’s new punctuation. Sirens layer beneath: civil defense, Harmony Index notices, and ambulances. A recorded voice declares *non-lethal pacification operations* over District 7, as if words could make pain polite.

The swarm drops into the square as if poured. Micro-drones—pepper aerosol, strobe bursts, taser-lash filaments—aimed to humiliate and subdue. The crowd folds, then spasms. Men claw at eyes that weep. Women cough until their ribs protest. A boy screams at a pitch Arash didn’t know existed. The drones keep their distance, as impersonal as math.

“Back!” Hossein yells, shoving Arash toward the narrow cut between buildings—the swallow way. “Torch above the door—wet rags here.” The bakery crew deploys like a fire brigade in reverse: cloth masks soaked, hands outstretched, a chain of water and mercy.

Arash pulls two teenagers into the alley, presses wet cloths to their faces, and breathes shallowly. The pain isn't tidy; it crawls. He risks a glance: Desk agents herd the "stunned" toward mobile processing vans where scanners glow. A woman slams her palm against the van and leaves a blood-red handprint that looks like a signature and a psalm.

A drone breaks formation and noses into the alley, its stinger hanging like a wasp's promise. Hossein swats it from the air with a baker's peel as if it were nothing more than a rude loaf. The peel thunks; the drone pinwheels, sparks, dies. "I have baked worse," Hossein mutters, face wet, eyes fierce.

The sat phone thrums in the safe window.

Arash: Swarms deployed. Non-lethal pain—pepper/taser/strobe. Vans scanning. We're pulling people via swallow way. Eyes, lungs burning. Pray.
Elena: First woe. Keep rags wet; rotate safehouses. Don't chase fights. Move the vulnerable before night.
Mariam: I can talk you through eye decon—milk/water mix, blink not rub.
Kerem: Istanbul reports the same—micro-swarms over metro hubs. We're opening doors with tea and vinegar cloths.

By dusk, the city twitches. The swarm pulls back to recharge; the rumor says *five-month deployment order*. Arash writes *150 days?* in his pocket notebook and doesn't show anyone.

He walks the swallow way with Hossein, caching inhalers and dates, checking the compressor's battery.

In a doorway, a student sobs without tears left. “I thought I was brave,” he says.

“You are,” Arash answers. “Bravery doesn’t cancel pain. It chooses roads.”

In Beijing, the Harmony Index flips from smile to snarl at noon. Drones drop with bureaucratic precision: alley by the copy shop, park where the church practices hush, the stairwell where the cabbage smell now means prayer. The stings are surgical—skin remembers shock better than slogans.

Chen shepherds the remnant across rooftops, Jia’s name in his mouth like stone and honey both. The copy shop girl, ink still on her fingers, hands out gauze squares soaked in diluted milk. “Blink,” she tells the blinking-blind. “Don’t rub.” Her voice is Auntie Mei’s now, and Jia’s, and the Church’s.

A boy laughs wildly when he realizes the drones will not cross the sagging laundry line between buildings. “Even machines fear socks,” he says, and the laughter steadies three people who might have broken.

In the alley, a van’s loudspeaker purrs: *Compliance relieves torment. Scan to receive relief.* The line forms, thin as hope. The first six get saline and enrollment. The seventh gets only enrollment. The copy shop girl glares tears back into obedience.

Her sat phone buzzes once, the window as narrow as a blade.

Copy Shop: Swarms. Stings. We move by roofs. Jia’s song in our throats. Pray for eyes and lungs and hearts not to harden.

Elena: Praying. Memorize Psalm 27, 46, 121. Move, don't gather. Mercy in small rooms.

Night sinks early in both cities. In Tehran, Arash prays over a compressor by flashlight. In Beijing, the remnant sings low, not to be braver than they are but to be exactly as brave as they must. The first woe hums over rooftops like an insect that forgot how to die.

45. Interlude: The Days of Stinging

"We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not despairing… always carrying around in the body the dying of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be revealed in our body."
— 2 Corinthians 4:8, 10 (NASB2020)

In Delhi, the banyan becomes an infirmary. Students blink through pain while Pastor Mathew reads Psalm 121 between rinses. Arun holds a cloth to a young guard's face—the same man who once tried to shut their barrel line. "I don't deserve this," the guard mutters.

"Neither do I," Arun says, and means grace. Laughter snorts through tears; the sting eases. Desk Four circles, confused by mercy that refuses to convert into a QR code.

In Cairo, Mariam trains the triage desk: blend milk and water, blink, breathe; hands off eyes. The matron posts a new handwritten memo: *WE TREAT PAIN WITHOUT SCANS*. A man in a suit argues, then folds when a sting hits him in the lobby, and the maintenance tech, grinning a little, rinses his eyes like a mother.

"Thank you," the man says later, sheepishly. He doesn't remove the memo. He doesn't sign it either.

In Moscow, the swarms don't come like they do elsewhere; torment finds other routes. Dmitri stands in a line at a new *CIVIC RELIABILITY REVIEW* door, watching men stew in fear where drones would have

made the fear honest. A woman in front of him whispers a prayer, forgets to whisper, and smiles when she realizes she didn't die for it. "We will sing anyway," she says. He nods. Later, Irina's flour tin receives another page of Light: *Truth is patient under pressure.*

In Khartoum, Amal hears about the stings via radio and refugees' eyes. Her ward has a different pain—cholera returns like a thief who knows where the silver is hidden. She tapes a note over the supply shelf: *WE CANNOT FIX THE WORLD. WE CAN FIX THIS DRIP.* Isaac adds, *AND THIS ONE.* They laugh and keep fixing drips.

Thread fragments, like bread torn small:

Arun: Eyes rinsed, hearts softer. Guard said "thank you."
Mariam: Lobby stung; lobby prayed. Babies still breathing.
Dmitri: No drones. Paper stings. Choosing song.
Amal: Pain different here. Same Jesus.
Elena: You're doing it right. Small obediences. Keep your windows small and your hearts open.

The first woe settles like grit in the lungs. The team learns the ritual: wet cloth, blink, don't rage; don't let torment appoint your theology. Sleep comes in slices. The Church sings in keys nobody wrote down. Mercy gets very boring and very holy.

46. Trumpet Six (Euphrates Released)

“Release the four angels who are bound at the great river Euphrates.” … “The number of the armies of the horsemen was two hundred million; I heard the number of them.”
— Revelation 9:14, 16 (NASB2020)

In Anatolia and Istanbul, the dry maps become real. Satellite shots spread—the riverbed like a scar, bridges useless where water isn’t, and convoy lines where fish should be. News anchors say *stability operations*; soldiers say *orders*; mothers say *don’t go,* and boys go anyway.

Kerem stands at a highway overpass and watches columns move east—fuel trucks, troop carriers, armored vehicles with antennae like insect spines. The “security corridor” app republishes itself as *mobilization lanes*. The color green means something new.

Ece reads the revised rules twice and then stops pretending to understand. “Certified shipments may proceed with military escort,” she quotes, then adds, “Which is to say, compassion at the pleasure of the war.”

Mustafa chews seeds like a man out of curses. “Roads are full,” he says. “But there is a canal road by Erz that trucks forget. We’ll take that.”

Kerem nods. “And we keep our receipts that heaven approves.”

They load water, filters, “candlesticks,” pediatric antibiotics—from Tripoli and Khartoum and small clinics with big hearts. A border captain texts two words Kerem never thought he’d see from him: *Go now*. He goes.

His sat phone vibrates.

Kerem: Euphrates corridor open—troops east, logistics east. We slip south on the canal road. Pray for eyes blind to mercy and sharp to war.
Elena: Noted. Avoid convoys. If stopped, state “hospital resupply” first, argue theology never.
Yoni: Addis hears the rumble like far thunder. We’re filling jerrycans and prayers.

In the hills near Jerusalem, Noam and David crest a ridge and see dust columns where roads meet horizons. Old men mutter, young men stare too long, and mothers tie scarves tighter. The two figures on the far hill are closer now; their voices carry like wind borne through a *shofar*.

A boy asks, “Are those the men?” David says softly, “They are men God speaks through,” which is the safest sentence he can love and the truest.

Down in the valley, a convoy cuts toward the dried river path—dust over camouflage, men tired before they begin. Noam frames their movement—ants from this distance, inevitable from any—then lowers the camera to help a grandmother over a rocky patch because prophecy doesn’t carry water.

The sat phone fights for a burst and wins.

Noam: Columns moving toward the riverbed. Dust like pillars. The two men stand nearer. Woe hum still in the air.
Elena: Stay high. Don't go curious. Film for memory; move for safety.
Arash: Tehran: call-ups, buses full. Metro red. Swallow way still open for now—southbound only.
Dmitri: Moscow declares solidarity; trains east. We pray with windows open.

In Tehran, mobilization notices hit phones like bad weather alerts. Arash watches a bus yard fill with boys who read like men in the wrong typeface. The Harmony Index pings: *civic reliability boost for enlistees.* He wants to kick the device and prays instead.

Hossein points at the map. "Tonight," he says. "We move the grandmother and child before the road is all uniforms."

"Swallow way," Arash agrees. "Ankles and compressor ready."

They launch at dusk, the city a faint smear behind, the road ahead a stitch of scrub and stone. Patrols pull north toward the main lane, leaving the edges thin. The dog at the shepherd's cut barks twice—*clear*. Hossein grins like a man who knows God likes donkeys and side paths. They cross where water should be and isn't.

In Tripoli, Lina hears mobilization on the shortwave—frequencies swap passwords, voices flatten. The sea still bleeds in places; the port is more uniform than

civilian. She chooses alleys over avenues, clinics over commentary. At a rooftop, she flies the drone for only one minute and captures a procession of trucks glinting east like beads on a string. She archives, not posts. The babies still need insulin today.

Thread fragments form a map:

Kerem: Canal road open. Passing Erz. Two inspections; one mercy. “Candlesticks” intact.
Lina: Sea still sick; roads east thicken. Cold chain stable. Drone down to one-minute windows.
Arash: Swallow way clear. Two more across. Patrols lean north.
Noam: Voices on the hill carry like thunder. We keep moving.
Mariam: Cairo receives talk of “stability deployments” east. We stock and pray.
Elena: All—avoid main corridors. Sleep in pairs. If a choice is between witness and survival tonight, ask the Spirit—He will be specific.

Night smears the map. Engines drone in the dark; prayers do too. The riverbed lies like a road carved by prophecy and used by men who think they are original. The second woe gathers weight. The team keeps its hands on the small obediences that make tomorrow survivable, and trusts the Lord of rivers, armies, and side paths to number the days and keep their ankles while the dust rolls east.

47. The Two Witnesses (Death & Rising)

"When they have finished their testimony, the beast that comes up out of the abyss will make war with them, and overcome them and kill them."
— Revelation 11:7 (NASB2020)

"But after the three and a half days, the breath of life from God came into them, and they stood on their feet… And they heard a loud voice from heaven saying to them, 'Come up here.'"
— Revelation 11:11–12 (NASB2020)

The rumor reaches the ridge like a cold wind: *They're down.*

Noam hears it from three mouths that don't know each other. David doesn't ask who said it; he asks where. The boy points toward the city's spine, where the light is strange even on dim days. The path down was treacherous last week; today it feels like a decision you can't undo.

They move—Noam, David, and a knot of evacuees who refuse to call themselves that anymore. They pass a crack in the slope that wasn't there before, and a fig tree that decided to live in two directions. The noise meets them halfway: a crowd that is not one crowd—chant, taunt, sob, laugh, pray—layered until the air shakes with meanings that cannot agree.

They see the first Witness before they see the second—linen dark with dust, face like a man who slept well last night and chose to wake anyway. He lies in the open square, carefully unguarded, as if mercy were on trial and the verdict required spectators. The second

lies ten paces away, the same peace on his face, the same refusal to be smaller, even in death.

Noam stops five steps inside the square, camera at his chest, fingers numb. He does not lift the lens. He looks. The men look like men. That is the first shock. No theatrics—just the quiet authority he heard in honey and thunder, now quiet in a different register. He hears David exhale the way a shepherd does when wolves think they've won.

Around them, the city has organized its unbelief. Banners: *HARMONY PREVAILED; PROPHETS OF CHAOS SILENCED*. An anchor desk huddles behind a portable light, the reporter speaking with a face that wants to celebrate but has learned caution this week. Officers stand with the posture that means *we will not start it, we will finish it*. A man throws a flower with a curse and looks ashamed when it lands near the linen. A woman in a plain dress kneels with her hands open, her face expressionless, her mouth silent.

Noam texts two words to Elena, not expecting delivery: *Witnesses down.*

He and David keep station at the edge of the square. For the first hour, the crowd behaves like audiences always do—hungry for novelty, quick to instruct the day on what it means. In the second hour, novelty runs out. Mockery sours. Fatigue shows its teeth. A boy throws a small stone, as if he wants to be wrong about his own arm. It skitters and stops short. An officer lifts his baton and then puts it down because even he feels the thinness of triumph.

Toward dusk on the first day, the power flickers and returns. The portable light buzzes. The reporter clears her throat and narrates sentences that will sound hollow in the replay. Someone produces a speaker and a phone; music stumbles into the square and dies because the playlist can't decide what mood the world is in.

Night falls. Noam and David switch watches, not because anyone told them to, but because faith has muscle memory. No one moves the bodies. The city is careful to obey its own prophecy—*do not allow burial*—as if that will force heaven to concede something it never promised to concede. The moon, bitten smaller than it should be, slides across a sky that forgot how to be sure of itself. Noam prays Psalm 27 without voice and sleeps with one eye open.

Day Two. The square becomes crueler, then quieter. Cameras multiply. So do guards. A delegation from the Council arrives late and leaves too early, the statement drafted and posted within minutes: *The City Is Safe*. A grandmother slips between men with radios and leaves a crust of bread by the first Witness's hand. No one stops her because tenderness is hard to arrest.

In the afternoon, a child laughs for no reason anyone can find. The sound hangs over the square like a misplaced prophecy. A soldier swears at nothing. A pigeon lands near the second Witness and then backs away very slowly, as if the ground has an opinion that birds respect.

Night Two. The air grows weight. Noam writes it in his notebook because his camera cannot: *weight*. Not heat, not cold. Not fear exactly. Weight like the pause before a conductor lifts his hand. David hums a psalm in a key that makes guard dogs lie down. Somewhere far up the ridge, an old man begins praying out loud and does not stop until morning.

Day Three. The square has fewer posters and more eyes. Some taunts; more silence. Mockery is expensive to maintain. An officer tells two teens to go home; they don't. A woman reads Isaiah to the man next to her; he shakes his head and stays.

Late afternoon, the air shifts. Not wind—presence. Noam's spine knows it first; his skin bristles as if the day has found its sentence. He doesn't look for a sign; he looks at the faces of the men on the stone.

It happens without smoke, without strings, without explanation—life like a tide coming in. The first Witness inhales. The second does as well. Their eyes open the way dawn opens: not flashy, inevitable. They do not sit up at once. They take the time between breaths like men who know time intimately. Then they rise—graceful, unstartled, as if the floor were an escalator whose schedule they kept.

A sound rises—screams and prayers and the word *God* raised on voices not used to it. Guards forget training. The reporter says nothing, which is the most honest sentence she's spoken all week. The grandmother who brought bread drops to her knees and covers her face with her hands, weeping with laughter.

Noam does not raise the camera. He falls to his knees without realizing it and discovers the posture was waiting for him. David is already down, both hands open, face wet.

The two look at each other and smile like men who agree on what matters. They lift their hands—not to hush, not to bless, just to draw the eyes up where eyes should have been all week. The voice follows like a trumpet that is also kindness: *Come up here.*

It is not thunder; thunder wishes. It is not a command as men use commands; it is an invitation with authority. The men—Witnesses, prophets, brothers—rise. Not like balloons, not like tricks. Like obedience. Their bodies answer a gravity older than stones, newer than morning. They go, and the crowd understands *going* in a way it has never understood leaving.

A quake answers—the small kind that local news calls *a tremor* and the faithful call *a footstep*. The city staggers without falling. The portable light crashes from its stand and dies well. A banner tears clean in a wind that nobody ordered.

Noam's phone vibrates in a miracle of bandwidth.

Noam: They stood. Voice said "Come up here." They went. Small quake. City listening.
Elena: Rev 11 fulfilled. Hold steady. Bowls ahead. Worship first.

The square empties in two kinds of hurry—fear and joy. A few stay, stunned into honesty. The grandmother picks up the crust of bread and eats it

solemnly like communion. The reporter wipes her eyes where she thinks no one can see and then speaks on camera a single sentence that will cost her later and save her sooner: “They were dead, and now they are alive.”

Evening thickens. Noam and David walk back toward the ridge unspeaking, the path lit by a sky that learned something today. Behind them, the city recalculates. Ahead of them, the hills remember the promise that once sounded like poetry and now sounds like logistics.

On the ridge, Noam writes in his notebook with new carefulness: *Death obeyed. Life obeyed more.* He underlines it and then closes the book, because some words prefer the mouth. He and David pray without agreeing on phrases, entirely agreed on the Person.

Night settles like a held breath. Tomorrow will bring bowls. Tonight brings worship. The Witnesses are not here, because they answered the voice all men hear and most pretend not to. Noam sleeps with his shoes by the door and his heart in a cleft that didn’t exist last week and always did.

48. Bowls 1-6 (Montage of Obedience)

"Then I heard a loud voice from the temple, saying to the seven angels, 'Go and pour out on the earth the seven bowls of the wrath of God.'"
— Revelation 16:1 (NASB2020)

Bowl One — sores on the marked (Tehran / Istanbul).
The line outside the pilot clinic looks like compliance until the rash shows. Arash lifts a shirt sleeve with permission and finds a bloom of lesions around the implant site—angry, weeping, ringed like a target. "It's infected," the clerk says, relieved to have a word that is not judgment. The saline rinse doesn't change the pain; the scan does nothing except log it.

In the bakery alley, Hossein mixes honey and boiled water like his grandmother did for wounds the empire didn't know how to name. Arash tapes gauze, prays small: *God, see this skin*. At the metro turnstiles, a poster claims *HARMONY HEALS*. A man with a bandaged wrist laughs without humor and says to no one, "Not mine."

In Istanbul, Kerem watches a young officer tug his cuff down over a raw patch that glistens like truth. Ece sees it too and hands him a jar of salve labeled *for chafing* because mercy refuses to humiliate. He pockets it, ashamed, grateful.

Bowl Two — the sea as blood (Tripoli).
What was red becomes final. The water off the breakwater congeals toward a color hospitals do not put on walls. Fish rot where they float. The harbor

smells like a slaughterhouse that forgot its purpose. Lina flies the drone for fifty seconds only, records what she refuses to narrate, archives, then goes back to carrying insulin because babies still convert sugar whether the sea confesses or not.

A patrol drags a net and brings up nothing anyone can sell. A boy on the seawall throws a flower and scolds himself for the theater—then leaves it, because mourning is also a job.

Bowl Three — rivers and springs (Addis / Delhi / Cairo).
In Addis the capful math surrenders to a harsher arithmetic. Yoni's strip turns the color that means *don't.* He says it out loud and then says it again, so no one will mistake caution for fear. The Water Captain rewrites her poster: *BOIL LONGER. FILTER THICKER. SPIT IT OUT IF IT'S BITTER*. The donkey, deputized, hauls extra charcoal as if he understands Scripture.

Delhi's banyan becomes a factory of sweetness. Arun and the students run three rings of brick fires. Pastor Mathew reads Exodus 15 again, without apology. Desk Four arrives with certified tablets and an urge to be thanked. Arun thanks them and keeps boiling.

In Cairo, shallow wells in the neighborhoods go metallic and then worse. The matron drafts a neighborhood map with *DO NOT GO* circles and *COME HERE* arrows. Mariam trains grandmothers how to make a filter from a bottle, a cloth, and stubbornness. The grandmothers nod as if they always knew.

Bowl Four — scorch (Addis / Cairo / Delhi).
Heat stacks on heat. Shadows fail at their job. Yoni moves the shade tunnel twice; children lie under it with their feet toward the pump like pilgrims at a small mercy. Sun rash blooms where the sores did not. Tesfaye curses softly and invents longer sleeves out of charity-house shirts.

In Cairo, the NICU's generator wheezes and catches; the maintenance tech tapes foil over a window and bows to it as if it had helped. A mother fans a baby's face with a Bible tract; Mariam does not mind. "The Word does both," the matron says, and orders more water for staff who forget they're human.

Delhi's tar roofs radiate meanness. Arun stations students with buckets at the stairwells and writes a sign no one asked him to: *WATER FIRST, ARGUMENTS LATER*. A policeman with the memory of stings in his eyes obeys it.

Bowl Five — darkness on the throne (Council centers).
Screens hiccup and die where decisions live. In Brussels, the Council feed loops two minutes of smiling unity, then black. In Beijing, Harmony kiosks reboot and stall, their faces caught between benevolence and blank. In DC, Elena's city dims without warning and stays that way long enough for the sirens to give up.

Elena lights actual candlesticks—thank you, Kerem—and reads Psalm 46 out loud to an empty room that isn't. Her sat phone holds a charge and, for two windows, holds the world together.

Noam: Night fell at noon in the city. The hill holds light enough.
Mariam: Lobby went dark. We taped glow strips to the risers again. Babies breathing.
Arash: Kiosks dead. People curse and then whisper. We move while the throne gropes.
Elena: Mercy is still certified by God. Keep moving. Short windows only.

Bowl Six — the river laid bare; the spirits that gather (Anatolia / Jerusalem / Tehran).
Maps become marching orders. The Euphrates is a road that men pretend they discovered. Across feeds and loudspeakers, three messages hop like unclean things—slick, persuasive, and amphibious in their logic. *It is necessary. It is righteous. It is inevitable.* Kerem hears all three while his truck rattles on the canal road. He answers none of them; he counts crates instead.

On the ridge above Jerusalem, Noam watches dust rise like prophecy and feels the air crackle as if speeches had teeth. David points without drama to the two figures on the nearer slope. Their words carry like thunder and honey again, but today wrath threads mercy—*come out, come up, do not take their mark, do not join their madness*. The crowd listens and sorts itself by sentences heard, not uniforms worn.

Tehran empties buses toward the east. Arash moves a grandmother and a child by the swallow way while loudspeakers promise dignity for those who enlist and a quieter torment for those who don't. He prays what

has become his only prayer: *Lord, keep our ankles; keep our yes clean.*

Night collects what the bowls poured out. The Church does the small thing in front of it, again.

49. Babylon the Great Falls

"Fallen, fallen is Babylon the great! She has become a dwelling place of demons… For all the nations have fallen because of the wine of the passion of her sexual immorality, and the kings of the earth have committed acts of immorality with her, and the merchants of the earth have become rich from the excess of her luxury."
— Revelation 18:2–3 (NASB2020)

"Come out of her, My people, so that you will not participate in her sins and receive any of her plagues."
— Revelation 18:4 (NASB2020)

"The merchants of the earth weep and mourn over her, because no one buys their cargoes anymore…"
— Revelation 18:11 (NASB2020)

"So will Babylon, the great city, be thrown down with violence, and will never be found again."
— Revelation 18:21 (NASB2020)

In New York the feed freezes on a smile that used to sell the world. Elena refreshes out of habit and gets the same frame: a bell-ringing she didn't attend, a ribbon-cutting no longer attached to a building. Tickers stall, then cascade—red like a judgment, not a color scheme. Across the river, sirens mix with the thin voice of alarms that were never meant to be used.

Her map lights up the way a patient's chart lights up just before a code. *Global Exchange* (the composite hub that replaced a hundred smaller floors) goes dark, then bright with an emergency protocol, then dark for

good. Offshore, a clearinghouse blinks out; in Brussels, the "synchronization hub" throws errors that read like a confession.

The sat phone window opens, and she doesn't waste it.

Elena: Systemic—exchanges halted, clearing broken, ports pausing. Smoke in harbor. Rev 18 language on my screen.
Noam: We hear a call up here: "Come out of her, My people."
Kerem: Corridors jam—merchants swear; we ship bread anyway.
Lina: Port siren. Something's burning that shouldn't.
Yoni: Trucks stop mid-road. We carry by hand. Church open.

Elena sends three instructions citywide to her network: divest to food & fuel, settle accounts in person, leave the tower before night. Then one more she didn't plan to type and types anyway: If you belong to Jesus and work inside the machine—come out now.

In Istanbul, Kerem looks down from the overpass at a mile of trucks that forgot how to be patient. The *Global Corridor* app spits a new error message—*MARKET HALT / SECURITY EVENT*—which is just a fancy way to say *we don't know what we built*. Ece's phone shows a live clip from the Bosphorus—black smoke where no ship should be burning.

"The captains will keep their distance," Ece says, voice gone flat with Scripture. "They'll watch and mourn."

Mustafa flips his sunflower seeds into a paper cup that says *coffee* and contains anything but. “We don’t mourn,” he decides. “We load.” They pivot the pallets—water, rice, antibiotics—onto smaller trucks that can think like goats.

A corridor officer arrives with a clipboard that trembles despite his best effort. “All green lanes are red,” he says. “Until… until the notice.” He looks at Kerem the way a man looks at a friend when his uniform is a problem. Kerem signs for the crates anyway, then hands the man a loaf. “Come by after your shift,” he says. “We’ll weigh your words and your bread together.”

In Tripoli, Lina climbs the safehouse stairs two at a time and breathes the wrong smoke—chemical, finance, something like plastic regret. From the roof, she sees ships pulled back from the breakwater, lights off, engines idling like animals that know there’s a fire and can’t see it yet. Down on the quay, cranes hang mid-gesture as if embarrassed to be caught taking.

The port authority loudspeaker tries for authority and finds only volume. “All crews hold position… certified cargo postponed… await further—” The message cuts, returns, contradicts itself. Men who have never read Revelation quote it without realizing: *in one hour…*

Lina launches the drone for one quick pass and archives what she refuses to narrate: a plume on the horizon where the *Global Exchange Data Center* ship has gone from hub to hearth. Sailors on nearby ships stare and do not move closer.

She tucks the drone away and moves medicine instead. “Come out of her,” she hears herself whisper, surprised by the verse in her own mouth. Yusuf nods, not surprised. “We will,” he says. “We are.”

In the hills near Jerusalem, the voice that announced woes now announces mercy disguised as command. David hears it again; the evacuees-turned-pilgrims hear it; even the stubborn hear something that refuses to be ignored. *Come out of her, My people.*

“What’s *her*?” a boy asks.

“The part of the world that taught us to buy and sell our souls,” David answers, and the boy accepts this as if it were an address.

Noam writes *come out* in his notebook and feels the weight of leaving, the relief of it too. He thinks of emails unsent and meetings that won’t be held and doesn’t grieve them. He prays for Elena, who still stands in a city that believes it can coordinate God.

In Moscow, Dmitri stands outside the Volkova tower and watches the foyer exhale employees who suddenly remember stairs exist. Screens inside the lobby flash a mural that used to be called *Prosperity* and now looks like a warning label. A woman from HR clutches a badge like a talisman and asks, “What do we do?”

“We go home,” Dmitri says. “We tell the truth. We stop lending words to lies.” Irina takes her arm like a mother would and escorts her toward the tram that still runs because trams are better than markets at understanding purpose.

In Cairo, the matron posts a new sheet over the old memo: *WE DO NOT BILL GOD*. It's a joke and a policy. Mariam nods and distributes food in paper bowls without asking anyone to scan. In the lobby, a man in a suit whispers "my shares" like a prayer and watches a nurse ignore him to check a child's pulse. He learns something without thanking anyone.

In Addis, Yoni hears the radio say words it doesn't understand—*default, counterparty, force majeure*—and answers with *bucket, rope, bread*. The Water Captain draws a flower around the day's entry in her ledger and writes *God pays*. Nobody argues.

By evening, the *Global Exchange District* (the composite downtown that thought of itself as Babel with better branding) glows the wrong orange. A substation explodes like punctuation on a sentence God didn't write. The tower with the heliport sheds glass like scales. An anchor on a nearby roof says "unprecedented" six times and runs out of synonyms.

From the sea lane, captains keep their distance and mourn loudly over radios because that is what prophecy said sailors would do. "Who will buy our cargoes?" one voice cracks, the question more theology than logistics. No one answers him. The cranes are very still.

Elena leaves the map on the table and the candlesticks lit. She takes the Queens basement stairs two at a time and steps into a neighborhood that still understands cash and casserole. She texts the thread:

Elena: Babylon falling. Come out. Don't go back in to rescue your reputation. Rescue people. Bread, meds, fuel. Cash and kindness.
Noam: We obey. We are already out.
Kerem: Merchants mourn; widows eat. That's our math.
Lina: Captains watch from far. We move near.
Dmitri: Truth has a louder voice today.
Mariam: We don't bill God. We treat the sick.
Yoni: Ledger says flowers.

Near Jerusalem, night carries the smell a long way—the smell of a city that sold souls for convenience and ran out of buyers. In the hills, David leads Psalm 46 not as an argument with the market but as worship: *Come, behold the works of the Lord… He makes wars cease*. The children sing; the old men's voices crack and keep going. The world keeps turning toward the moment when the King will speak on His mountain.

A courier slips a handbill under Elena's door while she sleeps at last: *FINAL NOTICE: MARKET RESUMPTION TBA*. She will laugh in the morning, not cruelly, just honestly. Markets will not resume; kingdoms fall; the Lord stands. And somewhere offshore, a captain reads Revelation out loud over the radio to men who stopped scoffing an hour ago.

50. Bowl 7 + The Return

"For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive, who remain, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we will always be with the Lord."
— 1 Thessalonians 4:16–17 (NASB2020)

"Behold, I am telling you a mystery; we will not all sleep, but we will all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet… and we will be changed."
— 1 Corinthians 15:51–52 (NASB2020)

"And the seventh angel poured out his bowl upon the air… 'It is done.'"
— Revelation 16:17 (NASB2020)

"In that day His feet will stand on the Mount of Olives… and the Mount of Olives will be split…"
— Zechariah 14:4 (NASB2020)

The air tightens like a drumhead before the strike. Noam tastes metal and honey at once. David squeezes his wrist. The sky, already thin from days of dimming, gathers itself as if breath were being drawn on behalf of the world.

The shout arrives—command and comfort married. The archangel's voice threads it, and the trumpet is not of men. The ground says *yes* with a shudder that is not panic this time but obedience—the seventh bowl poured, the verdict spoken: *It is done.*

The earth's exhale becomes an earthquake. The ridge undulates; an olive tree bows so low it almost prays. Noam drops to a knee and holds a child against his chest. David guides people into a cleft that wasn't there yesterday. Hailstones the size of sins begin to fall—and then, as if a hand covers, they spare the cleft like mercy remembers names.

Then the other sound begins—the sound graves make when they stop being correct.

From the hillsides and the terraces and the small walled places where families remember, stones lift their eyebrows; soil loosens like a promise kept. First one voice, then a thousand—the dead in Christ rise, as scheduled by a calendar men did not print.

Noam stares through tears that arrive with no embarrassment. He sees a woman standing where he buried her last year—hair like it remembers wind again, eyes full, body new. Farther down, he sees three men lift from the ground that had learned their weight and will not keep it. On the ridge opposite, a shepherd sobs when his father's laugh returns to a mouth that laughs better now.

Beside him, David's face breaks into the most honest expression Noam has ever seen: grief emptied, joy overflowing, awe that behaves itself. "First," David says under his breath, as if ticking the verse: *the dead in Christ rise first.*

Across the world, the same sentence completes itself.

In Cairo, in the hospital garden, a volunteer sets down a tray as two graves near the far wall lose their

boundaries. The matron's mentor—gone these five years—stands, eyes bright, body whole. Mariam drops the tray, then laughs through tears because who cares about cups when resurrection is happening. "First," she whispers, and reaches for the hands she has named in prayer every week.

In Delhi,pastor Mathew points past the banyan at a small cemetery cornered by a brick wall and a tailoring shop. Cloth covers slip; dust decides not to cling. Arun steadies a weeping student as her grandmother steps forward, *sari* perfect, smile even more so. Mathew laughs like thunder politely contained.

In Moscow, Irina's hands fly to her mouth. In the snow-soft ground where the church placed its saints, a man who taught Dmitri Psalms in secret stands, breath steaming in air that suddenly feels young. Dmitri forgets language for a long second and then remembers the one word large enough: "Jesus."

In Tripoli, Addis, Tehran, and Istanbul— the same yes, the same rising. The Church receives her dead back in order—not to keep, but to join.

The second part comes like a twinkling—no time for counting, only time for astonishment. Noam feels it in his bones, then beyond his bones—the change. Weakness takes off its shoes and leaves. Mortality loosens its belt and laughs for the first time. He is still himself, more himself, the ache in his knee gone, the camera suddenly light as a leaf. Around him, the living who belong to Jesus glow without glowing; strength runs to their fingers like good electricity.

David straightens to his full, surprising height, eyes gone wide with a joy that does not bruise. The child in Noam's arms wriggles, startled, then giggles at a new body that already knows how to be fearless.

They lift.

Upward is not escape; it is appointment. Noam rises with a thousand, with ten thousand—Jerusalem's hills exhaling people like seeds to the wind. They are not balloons; they are guests being escorted. Below, the cleft holds those still looking up; above, clouds gather like a wedding canopy.

They meet Him in the air.

The Lord's presence is not a brightness that hurts; it is a light that tells truth without scolding. Scars with meaning. Eyes that make men braver by being seen. The archangel is nearby, like a pillar of sound and strength; multitudes like a choir that finally found the right key.

Noam sees faces he knows—not many, just enough to be personal in the middle of glory. Jia—laughing, alive—near the edge of the great company, eyes on Jesus, voice in a song that needs no microphone. Auntie Mei beside her, hands lifted as if she always knew this chorus. The journalist Dmitri prayed for, grinning like a man whose punctuation resolved. Elena among a great cloud—shining like lanterns—smiling as if every journey arrived at the same King.

Words form in Noam and require shape. He uses the ones the Spirit gave beforehand: "Yes, Lord." It fits the sky.

They turn.

They do not hover forever. The meeting is not the end; it's the escort. The company of the raised and the changed angles toward earth at the pace of a procession that knows timing. Air parts like fabric; clouds consent with pleasure. Below, the Mount of Olives waits like a prophecy underlined twice.

Feet touch where Scripture said they would.

The Mount splits—not as a tantrum, as a doorway. East to west, water remembers its orders and flows both ways—east toward the old Dead Sea, west toward the Great Sea. Noam lands where obedience tells his feet to be. The new body does not stumble; it worships by standing correctly.

Weapons clatter like poor arguments. Some hands cannot let go yet; they freeze as if fingers are reconsidering loyalties.

Hail relents; thunder becomes pronouncement: justice without hurry, mercy without dilution. The faithful are gazing on the face they waited for.

Noam's sat phone—still strapped to a wrist that does not need it—vibrates once in a mercy of bandwidth and then retires from duty.

Elena: "So we will always be with the Lord." Be kept. Worship. (1 Thess 4; 1 Cor 15; Zech 14.)

He laughs—of course she would send Scripture as a benediction at the end of the great, long waiting.

Around him, the newly changed set about the first acts of a Kingdom landing: steadying the frightened, lifting

the fallen, pointing to the King with names not needed but still used. Mariam arrives with a mother she prayed into courage. Arun kneels, then stands, then kneels again because both are right. Yoni tastes the air and declares it sweet. Kerem cries without apology, a hand on Ece's shoulder as if to say *we told the truth as best we knew*. Amal, hands free of IVs, raises them anyway. Arash touches his ankles and laughs because God kept them. Dmitri sings something ancient and Russian that knows how to be at home here. Lina looks toward the sea, which is quieting as if it learned reverence.

The Lord speaks—one sentence, two, and a world of answers wrapped inside them. The sound is a home you didn't realize you'd been describing in every prayer. *It is done.* The throne has always been His; now the earth remembers.

Noam lifts his face, which has forgotten how to fear, and understands more than he can say: the dead rose first; the living were changed; we met the Lord in the air; and now we walk with Him where His feet stand. The mountain is a doorway; the valley is a promise; the city is about to learn a new word for peace.

He puts the camera away. Worship is the work now.

51. The Millennium (Jerusalem)

"Then I saw thrones, and they sat on them, and judgment was given to them… and they came to life and reigned with Christ for a thousand years."
— Revelation 20:4 (NASB2020)

"And many peoples will come and say, 'Come, let's go up to the mountain of the Lord… For the law will go out from Zion and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem…'"
— Isaiah 2:3–4 (NASB2020)

The first days are quiet in a way cities don't know how to be—machines learning humility, voices choosing smaller words, feet remembering how to walk without checking the news.

Noam helps rebuild a stairway in the Old City that cracked when the mountain parted. Stone on stone, line on line, hand to hand. A boy asks if there will be scanners again. "There will be shepherds," David answers, and the boy decides this is better.

Administration feels like pastoring with ledgers. Disputes over fields become psalms when a glorified man—was he a pastor two ages ago?—listens without hurry and renders a right decision without bribes. The nations send delegations with hunger in their eyes that has nothing to do with bread. They come without stagecraft and leave with assignments: plant, repair, reconcile, learn songs.

Noam witnesses moments that would have looked small in the old world and look like government now: a widow's roof repaired by men who used to measure

jobs in likes; a market where weights balance because the One who loves scales sits within walking distance; a classroom where children recite Micah 4 before lunch and then take lunch to the construction crew because the teacher said *go*.

Sometimes light catches in the air like the afterglow of a thunderhead, and men in bodies that do not tire appear and disappear across distances like that's normal. Their faces carry the kindness of those who have died and are no longer afraid of anything. They speak quietly and with authority that doesn't bruise. One of them asks Noam about the archive. "Keep it," he says. "Tell what you saw. Teach them to remember rightly."

The Two who thundered now walk, less spectacle, more shepherd. In the early days, they mediate three stubborn disputes that would have become wars before; now they become handshakes that turn into shared tools. Honey and thunder both, but mostly honey.

Water runs east and west from the place it was promised to. Gardens ignore calendars. A man plants vines where a checkpoint used to sigh; a woman grafts fig to fig and hums Isaiah because she can. Wolves observe lambs with curiosity and no malice. Noam laughs out loud the first time and then laughs at himself for being surprised.

Pilgrims come, not like tourists, more like sons coming home with questions. A craftsman from Anatolia asks how to turn a checkpoint office into a clinic; Ece would have loved the plan. Kerem arrives

later with journals full of names that need roofs and tools; he grins at the new weights in the market and forgets to pretend cynicism. Lina walks the southern steps at dawn and cries because the sea finally smells like itself again. Yoni teaches teenagers to repair pumps without stealing screws. Mariam, when she visits, kisses the forehead of a child who used to need a NICU monitor and is now a boy who runs too fast in sandals. Amal stands in a garden in the hills and stares for a long time at a world that let her put down the IV kit. Arash laughs with Hossein over bread that did not need to be hidden; ankles light, roads open. Arun kneels on smooth stone and says the thing he promised to say if he ever saw this day: "Jesus, make me small and useful."

Noam receives a task he didn't draft: teach memory. He gathers youths who know only rumors of the old fear and says their names first so they understand they aren't projects. He shows them a still image labeled *Hands, Day One* and another labeled *Words and Stones, Day 5* and then the one he kept only in his head until now, which the Lord allows him to speak. He tells them how stones can be heavy for those who lift against the Lord and light for those who stand where He tells them to stand.

Sometimes, at sundown, a glorified woman appears at the edge of the square—face bright with the peace of someone long past dying—and speaks with a group of widows about justice as if it were a recipe. She reminds Noam of Elena: maps, candles, and names. He tells her so one evening. The woman smiles, like recognition, and says, "We work for the same King."

The nations bring their questions in their own languages and discover they are understood without translators. Law goes out without swagger. Swords remember how to be plowshares. Men who memorized riots now memorize harvest schedules. The word *administration* stops meaning *performance* and starts meaning *service*.

There are still tears, some of them good. Noam cries often when he teaches; he is not embarrassed. He sleeps with peace that does not depend on curfew or generators, and some nights he dreams of the cleft in the rock and wakes thanking God for geology that obeys on command.

One afternoon, a boy asks if the King will walk by today. “He walks where He chooses,” David says. “And He sees you where you are.” As if on cue (or perhaps because grace likes to set up such moments), a figure appears at the far end of the street. Noam does not lift a camera. He stands with everyone else. They are very quiet, very happy, very brave without trying.

When evening comes, lamps glow for beauty, not necessity. The city sings a key that matches its stones. The mountain that split still holds, not as a wound but as a doorway. Noam writes in his notebook, in letters newly careful: *Reign looks like shepherding*. *Memory is worship*. *The King is here*.

52. The Release and the Last Rebellion

"When the thousand years are completed, Satan will be released from his prison, and will come out to deceive the nations which are at the four corners of the earth, Gog and Magog, to gather them together for the war; the number of them is like the sand of the seashore. And they came up on the broad plain of the earth and surrounded the camp of the saints and the beloved city… and fire came down from heaven and devoured them. And the devil who deceived them was thrown into the lake of fire and brimstone, where the beast and the false prophet are also; and they will be tormented day and night forever and ever."
— Revelation 20:7–10 (NASB2020)

The change is not in the stones; it is in the air—like a wind that forgot its manners. Noam feels it first as a prickle behind the eyes, then as a thinness under ordinary joy. The city is still the city—gates open, weights honest, children racing along the river—but a rumor moves without feet.

David notices, too. "Watchfulness," he says, quietly, as if adjusting a lamp wick. The elders in the square nod the way men nod when shepherding turns from teaching to guarding.

Across nations that learned to be neighbors, whispers take on shapes: old grievances repainted, old lies with new fonts. *You are overlooked. Their justice is your loss. Why should the nations stream to Zion?* The sentences seem to arrive from nowhere and fit mouths that never practiced them.

Noam walks the markets, then the northern ridge. He sees a delegation pause at the gate with a look he hasn't seen in an age—calculation where there used to be gladness. A glorified woman—kind as sunrise—meets them, listens, answers without heat. Some soften. Some do not.

Reports arrive, not panicked, just exact: gatherings on the plain beyond the old hills; banners no longer about harvest but about grievance; leaders who speak in half-truths that sound like courage. Names that once meant myths return to conversation—Gog, Magog—like geography trying on theology.

"Do we bar the gates?" a young steward asks.

David shakes his head. "Our King has never needed a lock. But we post watchmen, and we pray."

Noam writes *watchmen* in his notebook and feels the word settle like a stone in the right place.

At dusk a day later, the plain beyond the city accumulates people the way the sea accumulates waves. From the ridge, it looks like a dark embroidery on bright land. They bear tools turned back into weapons, slogans repainted as principles, faces earnest with a zeal that doesn't ask the right questions. The number is what Scripture promised—like grains of sand.

The saints do not muster in kind; they gather in order. Glorified servants take places along the wall—not to strain, but to stand. David moves through the courtyards, not with stratagems but with assignments: water here, tend the children there, sing this psalm if

fear begins to talk too loudly. “We do not rage,” he tells a cluster of men whose hands remember what fists used to mean. “We trust the King.”

On the eastern steps, Noam sees familiar faces arriving—not alarmed, simply faithful: Yoni with the teenagers he taught to fix pumps now carrying water like priests; Kerem and Ece setting up a table of weights and bread as if justice in little things is how you fight; Mariam organizing the infirm with a tenderness that shames panic; Arun leading a psalm that insists on joy; Arash talking in low, steady tones to men who look like they came to argue and forgot the words; Dmitri with Irina, singing without hurrying; Lina scanning the sky out of habit and then grinning—“Old instincts,” she mutters, and prays instead.

Night flows in without menace. The plain moves closer. Torches flicker like anger trying to look noble. A chant stumbles into coherence and hardens. Noam feels the old ache—he would have filmed this once—but the new body prefers prayer. He does both: a few stills for memory, mostly worship for truth.

Morning arrives in obedience. The company on the plain “comes up,” as the text said it would, and surrounds what cannot actually be surrounded. The beloved city breathes; watchmen sing; David’s voice is warm and bright: “Eyes up.”

They come within bowshot and stop, as if the world forgot how to cross the last ten paces without permission. A leader lifts his hand for a speech. He gets a syllable out.

Fire answers.

It is not a storm; storms argue. It is not rage; rage is sloppy. Fire comes down the way a verdict is delivered—clean, final, uninterested in debate. It devours what gathered to devour. Banners unmake into ash; weapons become memory. The scream that rises is brief, then gone. The plain is suddenly a field again.

Noam's knees find the ground without instruction. The city exhales as if it had been holding a breath it didn't need to. The children, who had been brave on purpose, grow brave without trying.

On the far edge of the world—beyond sight and still witnessed—the dragon meets his end. The sentence fits the ancient crime: into the lake already occupied by the beast and the false prophet he fed. No parole, no future tricks; torment without end for the one who taught men to lie about God. Somewhere, theology graduates into praise.

David's hand lands on Noam's shoulder. "It is just," he says, not delighted, not dour—true.

Noam writes: *The last deceiver ended. The King's patience was not weakness.* He underlines *patience* and realizes he is crying again, not from fear, but from relief older than his life.

The city begins to move as the city always should—toward work that is worship. Ash turns to soil. Soil welcomes seed. People pick up a song where watch-calls leave off. A boy asks if there will be more wars. "No," David answers, smiling without pretending. "This was the last."

Noam turns toward the ridge without thinking; his legs remember the first great cleft and the water that began there. The air tastes like the day before a feast. He feels the world lean toward a different throne room, and the scripture he taught the youths flows through his mind like good water: *Then I saw a great white throne…*

"Come," David says, and they do—Noam, and the saints, and the city that belongs to a King who has finished letting evil speak and is ready to speak last.

53. The Great White Throne & The New (Forever)

"Then I saw a great white throne and Him who sat upon it, from whose presence earth and heaven fled, and no place was found for them. And I saw the dead, the great and the small, standing before the throne, and books were opened… and another book was opened, which is the book of life; and the dead were judged from the things which were written in the books, according to their deeds."
— Revelation 20:11–12 (NASB2020)

"Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth… And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God… And He who sits on the throne said, 'Behold, I am making all things new.'"
— Revelation 21:1–5 (NASB2020)

Noam stands where the mountain once argued with itself and became a doorway. The day has the quality of an intake of breath. Even the olive leaves hold still.

It begins with a vanishing you can't film—heaven and earth stepping aside like servants who understand the room belongs to Someone else. Then the Throne, white not as paint but as rightness, and the One upon it. Presence presses; knees know what to do.

They come—*all* the dead, great and small. Kings who rehearsed speeches forget them; children who never had a chance to be cruel; ordinary men with ordinary days in ordinary books that are not ordinary now. Books open. Another Book opens, and the air knows its pages by heart.

Noam doesn't narrate; he witnesses. Justice moves with no hurry and no loss. Deeds are weighed on scales that never need calibration. Excuses wilt. Lies dare not approach the dais. A woman he remembers from a checkpoint hears as her name is read from the Book of Life, and she sobs in gratitude. A man who loved crowds more than people reaches for an argument and finds only silence; the silence tells the truth. Noam thinks of Dmitri's sentence—*words mean things*—and sees the words stand up and report themselves, one by one.

Near him, David prays with his face on the ground, the posture of a shepherd when the Chief Shepherd speaks. Saints—glorified, steady—attend the moment with the compassion of those who remember being judged and acquitted by Another's wounds. Jia stands a few paces off, eyes bright, hands open; Auntie Mei beside her, lips moving—*worthy, worthy*—in a language heaven learned to speak before Babel.

There is a lake—final, terrible, just. Death goes there because it is not needed anymore. Anything that lied about God goes there too, and the lie ends where the line of mercy ends. Noam does not flinch; he grieves without opposing the Good.

When the last page is read and the last name either found or not, the Throne speaks a sentence that shakes nothing and steadies everything: "Behold, I am making all things new." It's not a wish. It's an act.

The world returns different. New heaven; new earth. A sky that never learned dimness. Hills that remember Eden and go past it. Water that sings in

clarity. No temple; a Presence that renders temples antique. Noam laughs and realizes laughter is now the right volume for most things.

The City comes—Jerusalem made new, descending like a bride who knows she is loved. Its walls are not about keeping out; they are about belonging in. Foundations tell stories in colors; gates remember tribes; streets forget dust without forgetting pilgrims. The light is a Person. Nations walk by it with their old swagger re-made into glad service. There is work, and it is worship.

Noam enters with a crowd that is not a crowd—brothers, sisters, saints who recognize each other by gladness. He tastes the river, clear as promise, and doesn't apologize for the first gulp or the second. The tree on either side offers leaves like treaties and fruit like calendars you eat.

Faces—His people, reassembled as the Lord always intended. Mariam laughs as a former patient outruns her along the river walk; the matron wipes tears that are not sorrow and declares she is off duty forever. Yoni explains pumps to children who will only need the metaphor, and they applaud anyway; the Water Captain—taller now—bows like a minister for real. Kerem and Ece lean over a scale in the marketplace out of habit; it balances itself and they grin like thieves forgiven. Amal sits beneath a fig and says she can finally sleep without listening for trucks; someone quotes Psalm 4, and she nods. Lina watches the river as dolphins write cursive near the far bank, and she claps like a child. Dmitri sings with Irina, a psalm that

knew this city before he did; the journalist adds a harmony he did not deserve and is allowed to keep. Arash jogs the broad steps with Hossein, ankles light; they are laughing about bread again. Arun kneels, stands, kneels—both are still right—and Pastor Mathew's hand on his shoulder is affection, not warning. Elena stands near a gate named for a tribe she used to map, a lantern in her hand because she likes the symbol even if the sun does not set here.

No more scanners. Names written, not coded. Weights honest because the King sits inside these walls. The leaves on the tree do what they promised—heal nations.

A child asks Noam what the first thing he will film is. He ruffles the small head and points at the Throne that is everywhere and the Face that is light. "I think we'll mostly put the camera down," he says, smiling. "We'll learn to remember by worship."

He walks to the river's edge. David joins him, quietly. They don't need to speak. Words meant for storms have retired; words meant for praise go on shift and never tire.

A voice—familiar, everything—carries without raising: "Behold, I am making all things new… Write, for these words are faithful and true." Noam laughs because he is known. He writes without fear. He writes for joy. He writes because memory is a sacrament now.

There is no night. There is no curse. There is a city where gates never learn to lock, a King who is never distant, a people who finally understand home. Noam

closes his eyes and opens them to the same light. He thinks of the first message he sent on a cheap sat phone years and a lifetime ago, and of all the fragments since. They were true enough. This is truer.

He puts down the notebook and lifts his hands because hands were made for this. “Yes, Lord,” he says with the whole city, the whole Church, the whole new creation. The word lands and lives. The story continues, and the ending, at last, is not an ending at all.

APPENDIX: HISTORIC PREMILLENIALISM

Introduction to Historic Premillennialism

In historic premillennialism, when Christ returns at the beginning of the Millennium, believers are resurrected or transformed and receive glorified, imperishable bodies (1 Corinthians 15:51–54; 1 Thessalonians 4:16–17). From that moment onward, they never die again, and thus their eternal life has already begun in its full, bodily sense.

1. The Millennium as the Beginning of the Consummated Life

For believers, the Millennial reign is part of eternal life—not something temporary in its nature, but a distinct phase of it:

- They are already glorified (incapable of sin or death).
- They reign with Christ (Revelation 20:4–6).
- They experience perfect fellowship with Him on a renewed earth, though not yet the final new heaven and new earth described in Revelation 21–22.

In other words, eternal life has fully begun for them personally, though creation itself has not yet been finally renewed.

2. The Presence of Unglorified Humanity

At the same time, according to historic premillennialists:

- Some people survive the tribulation as mortal humans and enter the Millennium still in natural bodies.
- These survivors (and their descendants) live under Christ's righteous rule but still can sin, reproduce, and die.
- The Millennium, therefore, contains both glorified saints and mortal nations (cf. Isaiah 65:20; Zechariah 14:16–19).

3. Transition to the Eternal State

After the Millennium:

- Satan is released, defeated, and judged.
- The final resurrection and judgment of the wicked occur.
- God creates the new heaven and new earth—the final and fully eternal order.

By this point, all evil is removed and only glorified, resurrected life remains—what most would call "heaven" in its ultimate sense.

The Role of Believers during the Millennium

1. The Core Role: Reigning with Christ

- Believers reign with Christ for the thousand years (Revelation 20:4–6).
- This reign expresses the fulfillment of promises like:

- "You have made them a kingdom and priests to our God, and they shall reign on the earth" (Revelation 5:10).
- "If we endure, we shall also reign with Him" (2 Timothy 2:12).

This reign is active and participatory—not passive observation. Believers are co-regents, exercising righteous authority and service in harmony with Christ's perfect will.

2. The Nature of Their Rule

- Administrative – governing the nations alongside Christ (cf. Luke 19:17–19; Matthew 25:21).
- Priestly and Mediating – serving as spiritual representatives who manifest divine wisdom and justice.
- Instructive – glorified believers teach and guide those still in mortal bodies, showing them God's truth and the reality of His kingdom.

This isn't "ruling" in a harsh sense, but rather a servant kingship, modeled after Christ Himself. The saints are agents of His restorative reign.

3. The Ongoing Presence of Mortal Humanity

Mortals who survive the tribulation—enter the Millennium in natural bodies.

These people:

- Live, marry, and have children.
- Experience long lives (Isaiah 65:20–25).

- Can still sin and need to submit to Christ's rule.

4. Evangelism and Conversion During the Millennium

(a) Yes, there is continued evangelism among the mortals

- The knowledge of the Lord spreads across the earth during this time (Isaiah 11:9; Habakkuk 2:14).
- Glorified saints bear witness to Christ's reign through their presence, wisdom, and ministry.
- Mortal nations are taught righteousness (Isaiah 26:9) and come to worship in Jerusalem (Zechariah 14:16).

Thus, evangelism continues—not as an urgent rescue from judgment (that has just occurred), but as a discipling mission within a world visibly ruled by Christ.

(b) But not by glorified believers in the same way as before

- The righteous reign itself is the great testimony: truth, justice, and mercy perfectly administered.
- Mortal believers may continue normal evangelism among other mortals.

In this sense, the Millennium is a period of universal instruction, not of global rebellion—though a final rebellion will occur when Satan is released at the end (Revelation 20:7–10).

5. The Overarching Purpose

The Millennium displays the triumph of Christ's kingdom in visible form—a foretaste and transitional phase leading into the eternal order.

- It vindicates God's promises to Israel and the nations.
- It demonstrates the full restoration of righteous rule to earth.
- It reveals the perfect harmony of divine and human sovereignty under Christ the King.

Glorified believers' participation in that reign is the crown of their redemption—eternal life already begun, now shared in active service.

Early Proponents

Below is a summary of how some of the key early writers described the role of believers in that age.

1. Papias of Hierapolis (late 1st and early 2nd century)

Papias was a disciple of John's disciple Polycarp and said to have known some of the apostles.

- Papias wrote that after the resurrection, there would be "a period of a thousand years after the resurrection of the dead, when the kingdom of Christ will be set up in material form on this earth."
- He envisioned the saints enjoying creation renewed — vineyards producing abundantly,

peace among animals, and close fellowship with Christ.

- Though not explicit about "evangelism," his imagery suggests a world under redeemed stewardship — creation and humanity both flourishing under righteous rule.

Theme: The Millennium is the first harvest of resurrection life, with believers exercising dominion over the restored creation.

2. Justin Martyr (mid-2nd century)

In his *Dialogue with Trypho the Jew*:

- He affirms:
  "I and others who are right-minded Christians on all points are assured that there will be a resurrection of the dead, and a thousand years in Jerusalem, which will then be built, adorned, and enlarged."
- Believers would reign with Christ there, while nations continue upon the earth.
- Justin insists this was the plain sense of Scripture and part of the apostolic teaching.

While he doesn't speak of preaching *per se*, Justin depicts the Millennium as a time of peace and teaching, when the nations learn righteousness and the knowledge of God fills the world (echoing Isaiah 2 and 11).

Theme: The glorified saints share in governing and instructing the nations under Christ's reign.

3. Irenaeus of Lyon (late 2nd century)

A student of Polycarp (and thus a spiritual grand-disciple of John), Irenaeus gave an account in *Against Heresies, Book 5*.

- He wrote that the resurrection of the just will precede the kingdom, and that the saints will "be accustomed beforehand to receive the incorruptible" in preparation for the eternal state.
- He describes a renewed earth where creation itself participates in redemption — vines ten thousandfold fruitful, animals tamed, the curse reversed.
- Irenaeus envisions believers teaching and ruling over the nations that survive the judgments, fulfilling prophecies like Isaiah 11 and Psalm 72.
- The Millennium thus becomes a pedagogical kingdom — Christ and His glorified saints training the nations in righteousness before the final transformation of all things.

Theme: The saints administer the age of restoration, extending divine knowledge and justice to mortal humanity.

4. Tertullian (early 3rd century)

In *Against Marcion* (3.24), Tertullian echoes Irenaeus:

- He calls the thousand-year kingdom "a Sabbath of a thousand years" following six thousand years of human labor.
- The righteous will reign with Christ in the new Jerusalem, "brought down from heaven," and enjoy the recompense of their virtues."
- He saw this as a literal fulfillment of God's covenant promises, vindicating justice before eternity begins.

Theme: A millennial Sabbath — the world's rest under Christ's governance, shared by resurrected believers.

Recent Proponents

1. Continuity with the Early Church

Modern proponents like George Eldon Ladd, Millard Erickson, Craig Blomberg, Robert Saucy, and others see themselves as heirs of the early fathers such as Irenaeus and Justin Martyr.

They share three anchor points:

- The resurrection of believers occurs at Christ's return.
- Christ's reign is earthly, visible, and righteous, lasting 1,000 years.
- The saints reign with Him, participating in His restorative rule.

However, they reinterpret the imagery of abundance and governance through a more theologically integrated, less materialistic lens—emphasizing

spiritual fulfillment and ethical transformation rather than agrarian prosperity alone.

2. George Eldon Ladd (1911–1982) – Bridge Figure

Ladd's works (*The Blessed Hope*, *The Presence of the Future*, and *A Theology of the New Testament*) are the fullest expression of historic premillennialism in modern evangelical scholarship.

He taught:

- The Millennium is the visible manifestation of Christ's already-inaugurated kingdom (i.e., the "already/not yet" tension brought to full visible fulfillment).
- Glorified believers reign with Christ in administrative and priestly roles.
- Mortal humanity—those who survived the tribulation—continues to live, marry, and die.
- The Millennium is a demonstration of God's justice and peace, not a second probation or mass-evangelistic era. He saw the nations learning righteousness by exposure to the reign of Christ (Isaiah 2:3).

3. Millard Erickson – *Systematic Theology* (1998)

- He holds that the Millennium transitions history into eternity.
- Glorified believers reign with Christ, but the precise nature of their duties is unrevealed.
- The Millennium serves as a vindication of God's justice in history — showing that when Satan is

removed, humanity can indeed live under divine righteousness.

- With regard to evangelism, he allows that "some who live through into the Millennium may yet come to faith," but he avoids picturing glorified believers as missionaries. Their reign itself testifies to Christ's truth.

4. Craig Blomberg – *A Case for Historic Premillennialism: An Alternative to "Left Behind" Eschatology* (2009)

- The Millennium illustrates the fulfillment of Old Testament promises in concrete, redeemed history.
- Glorified believers' reign is priestly (mediating worship and truth) and royal (governing with Christ).
- He stresses the ethical dimension: believers model the redeemed life, and mortals are discipled into God's ways.
- With regard to evangelism, he leans toward a discipleship-oriented continuation rather than formal evangelism. Mortal nations encounter the reality of Christ's rule through teaching, justice, and worship, leading to conversion and spiritual growth.

5. Robert Saucy – *The Case for Progressive Dispensationalism* (1993)

- The Millennium displays Christ's rule in both heavenly and earthly dimensions.

- The glorified church participates as co-regents fulfilling humanity's original dominion mandate (Genesis 1:28).
- The saints' role is administrative and representative, exercising Christ's authority over creation.
- With regard to evangelism, Saucy viewed the Millennium as a time when the knowledge of the Lord fills the earth (Isaiah 11:9), suggesting that many mortals will come to saving faith. The agents of that influence may include both mortal believers and the visible reign of the glorified saints, but again, not "evangelism" as missionary proclamation.

6. The Shared Vision

In Summary:

Modern historic premillennialists retain the early church's hope of a literal, earthly reign of Christ with His glorified people, but they frame it in redemptive-historical and ethical terms:

- The Millennium is not an interruption of eternity but its first stage in full visibility.
- Evangelism, in the sense of calling the lost, gives way to instruction and transformation under Christ's manifest rule.
- The saints reign not to conquer, but to heal, teach, and serve—a royal priesthood in the truest sense.

Timelines:

1. The Basic Sequence in Historic Premillennialism views Revelation 19–22 sequentially:

- Christ returns (Revelation 19).
  → The resurrection of believers occurs; the wicked remain dead.
- The Millennium begins (Revelation 20:1–6).
  → Christ reigns bodily on the present earth for a thousand years.
- Satan's final rebellion and judgment (Revelation 20:7–10).
- The Great White Throne judgment (Revelation 20:11–15).
- The new heaven and new earth appear (Revelation 21:1–8).
  → This is the fully eternal state.

2. Where the New Jerusalem Fits

The consensus view among historic premillennialists:

- The New Jerusalem exists now in heaven as the dwelling of God and the glorified saints (cf. Hebrews 12:22–24).
- It is not yet permanently "descended" to earth during the Millennium.
- However, it may be visible or accessible, symbolizing the heavenly dimension of Christ's reign.

3. Scriptural and Theological Rationale

- Revelation 21:1–2 explicitly says the new heaven and new earth come after the first heaven and earth "pass away."
- The descent of the city (21:2, 10) is linked to that event, not to the millennial reign.
- During the Millennium, Christ's throne is on earth (Jerusalem), but God's ultimate dwelling with humanity(the New Jerusalem) awaits the post-millennial renewal.

George Eldon Ladd put it this way:

"The Millennium is still history, the reign of Christ within the old order.
The new Jerusalem belongs to the eternal order that follows the destruction of death and Hades."
(*The Presence of the Future*, pp. 265–266)

4. Summary

Concept	During the Millennium	After the Millennium
Earth	The present earth, renewed and ruled by Christ but not yet transformed	A completely re-created earth ("new earth")
Heaven	Heaven remains distinct, though closely joined to earth through Christ's reign	Heaven and earth united — "the dwelling of God is with men"
New Jerusalem	Exists in heaven, possibly visible or functionally linked to Christ's reign	Descends permanently to the new earth (Revelation 21:2, 10)
Believers' Dwelling	Glorified saints reign with Christ; their ultimate home (the city) is prepared	They inhabit the city in the eternal order
Divine Presence	Christ's mediatorial rule on earth	Full, unmediated presence of God (no temple, Revelation 21:22)

Historic Premillennial Timeline

1. The Present Church Age (The Age of Gospel Witness)
Revelation: Chs. 2–3
Other Key Passages: Matthew 24:4–14 | Mark 13:5–13 | Luke 21:8–19 | 2 Thessalonians 2:3–7 | 1 Timothy 4:1–3 | 2 Peter 3:3–9

Description

- Christ reigns spiritually from heaven; His Church proclaims the Gospel to all nations (Matthew 28:19–20).
- Satan (the dragon) still roams (1 Peter 5:8) but is restrained from total deception by divine sovereignty.
- Apostasy, persecution, and false prophets increase as history approaches its climax (2 Thessalonians 2:3).
- The "man of lawlessness" (Antichrist) has not yet been revealed but is foreshadowed in recurring tyrannies (1 John 2:18).

2. The Great Tribulation (The Final Crisis)
Revelation: Chapters. 6–18 (Seals, Trumpets, Bowls, and Babylon's fall)
Other Key Passages: Daniel 7–9; 11:36–45 | Matthew 24:15–29 | Mark 13:14–27 | Luke 21:20–28 | 2 Thessalonians 2:8–12 | Joel 2:30–32
A. The Rise of Evil Powers

- The Dragon (Satan) — cast from heaven to earth (Revelation 12:7–9); enraged, he persecutes God's people (12:13–17).
- The Beast from the Sea (Antichrist) — a blasphemous world ruler empowered by the dragon (Revelation 13:1–8; Daniel 7:23–25).
- The Beast from the Earth / False Prophet — a miracle-working religious deceiver enforcing worship of the Beast (Revelation 13:11–18).

B. The Persecution of the Saints

- The Beast wages war on believers and "overcomes" them in martyrdom (Revelation 13:7; Daniel 7:25).
- The "mark of the Beast" (13:16–17) controls commerce and loyalty.

- The faithful refuse the mark and endure to the end (Revelation 14:12).
- Two prophetic witnesses testify in Jerusalem for 1,260 days, are slain, then raised (Revelation 11:3–12).

C. God's Judgments and Cosmic Upheaval

- Seven Seals (Revelation 6–8:1): War, famine, martyrdom, cosmic signs.
- Seven Trumpets (8–11): Intensified plagues echoing Exodus.
- Seven Bowls of Wrath (15–16): Final judgments culminating in Armageddon.
- Kings of the earth are drawn by demonic spirits from the dragon, beast, and false prophet to battle at Armageddon (Revelation 16:13–16).
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3. The Second Coming of Christ (The *Parousia*)

Revelation: 19:11–21

Other Key Passages: Matthew 24:29–31 | Mark 13:24–27 | 1 Thessalonians 4:13–18 | 1 Corinthians 15:51–54 | 2 Thessalonians 1:7–10 | Zechariah 14:1–5

Events

- Christ descends in glory on a white horse (Revelation 19:11–16).
- The armies of heaven (including glorified saints, cf. Revelation 19:14) accompany Him.
- The Beast and False Prophet are captured and thrown alive into the lake of fire (19:20).
- The kings and armies opposing Christ are slain; the Dragon (Satan) is bound and sealed in the Abyss for a thousand years (20:1–3).
- Resurrection and transformation of believers occur (1 Corinthians 15:52 | 1 Thessalonians 4:16–17).
- Christ establishes His visible rule on earth.

4. The Millennial Reign of Christ (1,000 Years of Peace and Justice)
Revelation: 20:1–6
Other Key Passages: Isaiah 2:2–4 | 11:1–10 | 65:17–25 | Micah 4:1–5 | Psalm 72 | Luke 19:17–19
Description

- Christ reigns bodily from Jerusalem (cf. Zechariah 14:9).
- Glorified saints reign with Him ("priests of God and of Christ") — Revelation 20:6.
- The Dragon remains bound, unable to deceive the nations.
- Mortal humanity (survivors of the Tribulation) repopulates the earth, experiences peace, and learns righteousness.
- Nations come to worship the King (Zechariah 14:16).
- The curse on creation is largely reversed (Isaiah 11:6–9).

5. The Final Rebellion and the Destruction of Satan
Revelation: 20:7–10
Other Key Passages: Ezekiel 38–39 (Gog and Magog as prophetic type)
Events

- At the end of the Millennium, Satan (the Dragon) is released.
- He deceives the nations ("Gog and Magog") into a final revolt.
- They surround "the camp of the saints" and the beloved city.
- Fire from heaven consumes them, and Satan is cast into the lake of fire, joining the Beast and False Prophet (Revelation 20:10).
- Evil is now permanently eradicated.

6. The Great White Throne Judgment
Revelation: 20:11–15
Other Key Passages: Daniel 12:2 | John 5:28–29 | Romans 2:5–11 | 2 Peter 3:7 | Matthew 25:31–46
Description

- The present heaven and earth flee away (20:11).
- All the dead who were not in the first resurrection are raised.
- Books are opened; the dead are judged according to their deeds.
- Death and Hades are thrown into the lake of fire — "the second death."
- Only those in the Book of Life enter the new creation.
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7. The New Heaven, New Earth, and New Jerusalem (The Eternal State)
Revelation: 21–22
Other Key Passages: Isaiah 65:17 | 66:22 | 2 Peter 3:10–13 | Hebrews 12:22–24 | John 14:1–3
Description

- God creates a new heaven and a new earth (Revelation 21:1).
- The New Jerusalem descends (21:2, 10).
- God dwells with His people directly — "They will see His face" (22:4).
- No more death, sorrow, or curse (21:4; 22:3).
- Believers reign with Christ forever (22:5).

Overview Structure (Seven Years / 2,520 Days)
Detailed Day-by-Day Milestones (Approximate)

Day Range	Event / Judgment	Key Scriptures	Activity of the Dragon / Beast / False Prophet
Day 1–30	**Opening of Seals 1–4** — conquest, war, famine, death.	Rev 6:1–8	Dragon begins empowering geopolitical chaos; Beast's empire forms.
Day 31–200	**Seal 5** — martyrdom of saints; **Seal 6** — cosmic signs.	Rev 6:9–17	Persecution rises; early church martyrs cry for justice.
Day 201–250	**Seal 7 → Trumpets 1–4.** Environmental & celestial judgments.	Rev 8	Satanic forces stir ecological devastation; fear grips nations.
Day 251–500	**Trumpets 5–6 (1st & 2nd woes):** demonic torment & 200-million army.	Rev 9	Dragon directly releases demonic hordes from Abyss.
Day 501–1,000	**Two Witnesses minister** in Jerusalem (1,260 days).	Rev 11:3–6	Beast's rise contested by their prophetic signs.
Day 1,001–1,260	**Trumpet 7 sounds (3rd woe):** Kingdom announced; Temple measured.	Rev 11:15–19	Dragon cast from heaven (Rev 12:7–9); rage on earth begins.
Day 1,260 (Midpoint)	**Abomination of Desolation.** Beast breaks covenant, claims divinity.	Dan 9:27; Matt 24:15; 2 Th 2:3–4	Dragon empowers Beast (Rev 13:2); False Prophet appears (13:11–15). Mark of the Beast introduced.
Day 1,261–1,500	Global idolatry enforced; economic control via mark system.	Rev 13:16–18	Beast consolidates power; False Prophet performs signs.
Day 1,501–1,900	**Bowl 1–3:** sores, sea & rivers blood.	Rev 16:1–7	Judgments directly target Beast's empire.
Day 1,901–2,100	**Bowl 4–5:** sun scorch & darkness on throne of Beast.	Rev 16:8–11	Kingdom of Beast plunged into chaos; people blaspheme God.
Day 2,101–2,400	**Bowl 6:** Euphrates dries; spirits of dragon, beast, false prophet gather kings for Armageddon.	Rev 16:12–16	Demonic trinity unites world powers for final war.
Day ≈ 2,520	**Bowl 7:** " It is done " — earthquake, hail, collapse of Babylon.	Rev 16:17–21	Beast & False Prophet defeated (Rev 19:19–21); Dragon bound (20:1–3). Christ returns.

Interpretive Notes

- The seals unfold across roughly the first quarter of the seven years, initiating chaos and persecution.

- The trumpets overlap late first-half → midpoint transition, introducing divine judgments while still allowing repentance (Rev 9:20–21).
- The bowls are rapid, terminal judgments in the final months leading directly to Armageddon.
- The dragon being cast down (Rev 12) marks the pivot point—roughly Day 1,260—dividing ordinary tribulation from the "Great Tribulation."
- 1,260 days / 42 months / time, times & half a time = each half of the seven years (Dan 7:25; Rev 11:2–3; 12:6, 14; 13:5).
- Christ's return immediately ends the period; there's no gap before the Millennium in historic premillennial expectation.

The following chart will bring together the four major prophetic strands into a single harmonized framework:

1. Daniel's 70th Week (Daniel 9:27) – the prophetic "week" of seven years
2. The Revelation timeline (Seals → Trumpets → Bowls)
3. The activity of the Dragon, Beast, and False Prophet
4. Jesus' Olivet Discourse (Matthew 24 / Mark 13 / Luke 21)

Stage	Approx. Day Range	Daniel's 70th Week	Revelation Sequence	Dragon / Beast / False Prophet Activity	Olivet Discourse Parallels (Matthew 24)
1️⃣ **Covenant & Birth Pains**	**Day 1 – ~200**	*"He will confirm a covenant with many for one week."* (Dan 9:27a)	**Seals 1–4:** conquest, war, famine, death (Rev 6:1-8)	Dragon influences world powers behind the scenes (Rev 12:3-4); Beast's system begins forming.	vv. 4-8 — False Christs, wars, famines, earthquakes: *"These are the beginning of birth pains."*
2️⃣ **Persecution of Saints**	**~Day 200 – 1,000**	Covenant holds but opposition grows.	**Seals 5-6:** martyrs cry for justice; cosmic signs. **Trumpets 1-6:** escalating plagues. **Two Witnesses** minister (Rev 11:3–12).	Dragon still partly restrained; Beast rises (Rev 13:1-4).	vv. 9-14 — Believers delivered up, hated, many fall away; Gospel preached to all nations.
3️⃣ **Midpoint Crisis – Abomination of Desolation**	**Day ≈ 1,260**	*"In the middle of the week he will put a stop to sacrifice… and set up the abomination of desolation."* (Dan 9:27b)	**Seventh Trumpet** sounds (Rev 11:15). **Dragon cast to earth** (Rev 12:7-9). Temple desecrated.	Dragon empowers Beast directly (Rev 13:2). False Prophet arises (Rev 13:11-15). Mark of the Beast imposed.	vv. 15-22 — *"When you see the abomination of desolation… flee."* Beginning of "Great Tribulation."
4️⃣ **Great Tribulation & Wrath of God**	**Day 1,261 – 2,400**	*"On the wing of abominations will come one who makes desolate."* (Dan 9:27c)	**Bowls 1-6:** painful sores, sea/river blood, darkness, Euphrates dries (Rev 16:1-16).	Dragon, Beast, and False Prophet send demonic spirits to gather kings for Armageddon (Rev 16:13-14).	vv. 23-28 — False Christs and false prophets with great signs; distress unequaled in history.
5️⃣ **Cosmic Signs & The Son of Man**	**Day ≈ 2,400 – 2,520**	End of the 70th Week approaching: *"Until the decreed end is poured out on the desolator."* (Dan 9:27d)	**Bowl 7:** massive earthquake and hail; Babylon falls (Rev 16:17-21). **Rev 19:** Heaven opens; Christ rides forth.	Beast and False Prophet destroyed (Rev 19:20). Dragon seized and bound (Rev 20:1-3).	vv. 29-31 — *"Immediately after the tribulation… the sun will be darkened… then they will see the Son of Man coming."*
6️⃣ **The Kingdom Manifested**	**Day > 2,520**	After the "week."	**Rev 20:1-6:** Satan bound; saints reign 1,000 years.	Dragon imprisoned; Beast & False Prophet in Lake of Fire.	vv. 32-35 — Parable of the fig tree: the Kingdom near, generation sees fulfillment.
7️⃣ **The Final Judgment & Renewal**	—	(Post-70th Week)	**Rev 20:7-15 → 21-22:** final rebellion, Great White Throne, new heaven & earth.	Satan finally cast into Lake of Fire (20:10).	vv. 36-51 — Call to watchfulness and readiness for the coming of the Son of Man.

Key Observations

1. Daniel 9:27 supplies the framework: one seven-year "week," divided by a midpoint abomination.
2. Revelation's seals, trumpets, and bowls expand those seven years in telescoping fashion—seals lead to trumpets; trumpets culminate in bowls.
3. The Dragon's coming expulsion (Rev 12) = the turning point of history and explains the Great Tribulation's intensity.
4. Jesus' Olivet Discourse perfectly parallels this rhythm:
    1. Birth pains → Abomination → Great Tribulation → Cosmic signs → Second Coming.
5. The 2,520-day schema allows each half of the "week" to be roughly 1,260 days (42 months), matching Revelation's time designations (Rev 11:2-3; 12:6; 13:5).

The Seven-Year Drama: A Unified Narrative

History moves toward its appointed climax when a powerful world leader — the figure Daniel foresaw as the "prince who is to come" — brokers a covenant promising global peace and security. This begins the final "week" of Daniel's prophecy (Daniel 9:27). Jesus called the early years of this period "the beginning of birth pains" (Matthew 24:8): wars, famines, pestilences, and the rise of false messiahs. John's vision in Revelation shows these same conditions as the opening of the first four seals — conquest, war, scarcity, and death — shaking the earth as humanity's empires begin to unravel. Persecution of believers follows (Seal 5), and cosmic disturbances announce that divine judgment is near (Seal 6). Trumpet judgments intensify the crisis with ecological collapse, demonic torment, and global fear. Amid this darkness, God's witnesses proclaim truth and call for repentance.

Midway through the seven years, the covenant is shattered. The Dragon (Satan), expelled from heaven, empowers the Beast (Antichrist), who sets himself up in God's temple as an object of worship — the abomination of desolation foretold by both Daniel and Jesus (Daniel 9:27; Matthew 24:15; Revelation 13). The False Prophet rises as his religious enforcer, compelling the world to receive the Beast's mark. This midpoint marks the start of the Great Tribulation, a time Jesus said would be "unequaled from the beginning of the world" (Matthew 24:21). God's bowl judgments fall swiftly — sores on idolaters, rivers turned to blood, darkness over the Beast's throne —

while the unholy trinity gathers the kings of the earth for the final confrontation at Armageddon.

In terms of the rise of the Beast, imagine a charismatic leader who is (potentially) supported by a powerful AI designed for governance. His ascendance might happen as follows:

1. The Global Context That Makes the "Savior" Credible

- Cascading crises: economic collapse, climate emergencies, pandemics, regional wars, cyberattacks, and supply-chain failures.
- Information chaos: deepfakes, propaganda, and mistrust of all institutions.
- Technological anxiety: AI advances outpacing governance; fear of unemployment, weapons autonomy, and data abuse.
- Moral fatigue: citizens weary of polarization, demanding stability and competence.

A leader who promises to solve these through "responsible technology and global unity" could appear messianic.

Following is a chart of what that might look like:

Phase	Strategy	How It Wins Hearts
1. Crisis Response	Launch an **AI-driven stabilization plan**—predictive analytics for food, energy, health, and finance.	People see instant relief: shortages resolved, outbreaks tracked, disasters forecast.
2. Trusted Mediator	Present AI as a **neutral problem-solver** beyond politics. The leader becomes its "steward," explaining decisions and offering transparency dashboards.	Citizens transfer moral trust from fallible humans to "objective data."
3. Global Coordination	Form an **Alliance for Human Survival** merging major governments, corporations, and NGOs around shared AI infrastructure.	Unifies nations under a humanitarian narrative: "Together for the planet."
4. Digital Identity & Commerce	Introduce a **universal digital ID**—biometric, blockchain-secured—integrated with social, medical, and financial systems.	Markets stabilize, fraud drops; people welcome convenience and safety.
5. Moral Vision & Cultivation of Awe	Rebrand the system as **ethical AI** devoted to justice, equality, and peace. Public ceremonies, media campaigns, and virtual "town halls" reinforce global belonging.	Emotional buy-in replaces skepticism; dissent seems anti-humanitarian.
6. Unified Governance	Convert alliance bodies into a **Global Council**, advised by the central AI. The leader assumes an emergency mandate as "World Coordinator."	Citizens perceive it as the logical evolution of global cooperation.
7. Devotional Shift	The AI's guidance becomes **quasi-religious language**—"the Voice of Reason," "the Light of Humanity." The leader is portrayed as its chosen interpreter.	Gratitude morphs into reverence; loyalty tests are framed as civic virtue.

Then come cosmic signs: the sun darkened, the heavens shaken. The sky opens, and Christ descends in glory. The Beast and False Prophet are seized and thrown alive into the lake of fire; the Dragon is bound in the abyss. Believers — resurrected and glorified — join their King in reigning over the earth. The seventieth week ends where Daniel's vision, Jesus' warning, and John's apocalypse converge: the kingdoms of this world become the Kingdom of our Lord. Evil's dominion collapses, righteousness fills the earth, and history turns toward its millennial dawn.

Here's the continuation of that unified narrative, showing how the story flows from the destruction of evil at Christ's return into the Millennial Kingdom.

The Millennial Kingdom: The Dawn After the Storm

When the final trumpet fades and the thunder of war is silenced, the King of kings stands upon the earth He created. The rebellion of the nations has been crushed, Babylon's proud towers lie in ruins, and the powers of darkness are broken. The Beast and False Prophet — the embodiment of human and spiritual defiance — are gone forever, cast into the lake of fire. The Dragon, the ancient serpent, is bound in the abyss, no longer able to deceive the nations (Revelation 20:1–3).

Out of the wreckage of the old world, Christ establishes His righteous reign. The resurrection of believers has already taken place at His coming — the

“first resurrection” (Revelation 20:5–6). These glorified saints, described by John as “priests of God and of Christ,” reign with Him for a thousand years. The promises given to Israel — of restoration, peace, and the presence of their Messiah — now find literal fulfillment. Jerusalem becomes the world’s capital; the nations stream to it seeking the wisdom and justice of the King (Isaiah 2:2–4; Zechariah 14:16–17).

The curse that began in Eden is partially lifted: the earth yields its fruit, animals live in harmony, and life is long and joyful (Isaiah 11:6–9; 65:20–25). Yet this is still the old creation, not yet fully transformed. Mortal humanity continues to live, marry, and multiply under Christ’s benevolent rule. Some serve willingly, others only outwardly; all experience the visible government of God. The glorified saints, incorruptible and immortal, administer the kingdom’s affairs — guiding nations, teaching righteousness, demonstrating perfect love and justice.

For a thousand years, the earth enjoys peace unlike any in its history. The world that had once cursed its Creator now learns His ways from the reigning Son. But the kingdom, for all its beauty, is still the prelude, not the finale. When the thousand years are complete, the Dragon will be released one final time to test the hearts of the nations. Those who still harbor rebellion will rise — and fall — in a single moment of fire from heaven (Revelation 20:7–10). Then death itself will die; the old creation will pass away; and the New Jerusalem will descend upon a new heaven and a new earth where righteousness dwells forever.

Theological Reflection: What the Millennium Demonstrates

The Millennium stands as God's public vindication of His purposes. For all of human history, the question has lingered: What would the world be like if it were ruled in perfect righteousness? The thousand-year reign of Christ provides that answer — not as a theoretical ideal, but as a historical reality. Every promise God has made—to Abraham, to Israel, to the Church, and to creation itself—is displayed in living fulfillment. The King who was once rejected now reigns openly; the meek inherit the earth; and the knowledge of the Lord covers the world as the waters cover the sea (Isaiah 11:9).

This age reveals God's justice in judging evil. It shows that even under ideal conditions—abundant provision, perfect government, and visible truth—unregenerate hearts will still rebel once Satan is released. The final revolt at the Millennium's end proves that sin's root lies not in environment or ignorance but in the willful corruption of the human heart. Thus, the Millennium silences every excuse of humanity: when all outward obstacles are removed, rebellion still arises without the transforming grace of God.

It also manifests God's mercy. The nations that survive the Tribulation are not immediately destroyed but given life under the gracious reign of Christ. Justice and peace, longed for since Eden, become the daily atmosphere of the world. The saints, glorified and compassionate, share their Lord's rule not to dominate but to heal—to guide a broken creation

toward restoration. Even in judgment, mercy triumphs by offering life, truth, and peace to all who will receive them.

Finally, the Millennium serves as the bridge between redemption and re-creation. It is the harvest field of history's sowing—the era when every divine promise blossoms, before the full renewal of heaven and earth. Through it, God displays the completeness of His plan: justice executed, mercy extended, and creation restored, until at last the Son delivers the perfected kingdom to the Father (1 Corinthians 15:24–28). The reign of Christ in time prepares the way for the eternal reign of God in glory, where there will be no more night, no more death, and no more curse—only the unending light of His presence.

"The Long Arc of Hope" — A Devotional Reflection

The story of the end is not a story of fear, but of faith fulfilled. From the birth pains of the Tribulation to the dawn of the thousand-year Kingdom, every event in God's prophetic plan proclaims one truth: history is not spiraling out of control; it is being drawn to completion in Christ.

The Tribulation reveals what humanity becomes when it fully rejects its Maker. In that dark hour, the nations rage, the Beast rises, and the Dragon deceives—but even then, God does not lose His grip on the world. Every seal, trumpet, and bowl shows His sovereignty over judgment as well as mercy: He restrains evil until

its exposure is complete. The suffering of the saints is not forgotten; their prayers ascend like incense, and their endurance becomes the testimony that light still shines in the darkness.

When Christ returns, every injustice collapses under His feet. The One who once came to serve now comes to reign. The Kingdom age that follows is the vindication of everything the world mocked as weakness: humility, obedience, faith. The Lamb who was slain reigns as the Lion of Judah. His resurrected people share His rule—not to conquer, but to heal. Under His authority, the earth rests, creation breathes again, and truth becomes the law of the land. This is the justice the prophets foresaw and the hope the martyrs died believing.

Yet even this glorious millennium is not the end; it is the threshold of something greater. When the last rebellion is crushed, death itself is destroyed. The old creation—scarred by sin and time—gives way to the new. The New Jerusalem descends, and the dwelling of God is with His people. No more tears, no more curse, no more night—only the everlasting day of His presence.

For the believer, this is not speculation; it is motivation. The timeline of prophecy is the timeline of faith: a reminder that every trial has an appointed limit and every promise an appointed fulfillment. The Lamb who opens the seals also writes the names in the Book of Life. The same Lord who measures the days of tribulation measures the tears of His saints and will one day wipe them all away.

So we wait—not with anxiety, but with anticipation. The One who began history will finish it in righteousness. The trumpet will sound, the dead will rise, and the King will reign. Until then, we endure in hope, knowing that the story of redemption ends exactly where it began: with God dwelling among His people, and with His people delighting in Him forever.

The Kingdom counter-vision in the end days

1. The Posture of the Kingdom: Calm, Not Panic

Jesus repeatedly said, "See that you are not alarmed." (Matthew 24:6)

A Christ-centered community remembers that the sovereignty of God is never threatened by human invention. History has always moved toward His purpose. So believers refuse hysteria. They cultivate quiet confidence, the serenity of people who know how the story ends.

Fear makes us manipulable; peace makes us free.

2. Discernment: Testing Every Spirit, Every System

The church's calling is not to reject all technology but to discern its spirit—to ask:

- Does it honor truth or manipulate perception?
- Does it uphold human dignity or treat people as data?
- Does it draw attention to the Creator or to human self-exaltation?

Christians can work inside scientific and technological fields while maintaining a prophetic conscience: innovation with moral guardrails.

3. Community: The Antidote to Isolation

If a future society is hyper-connected yet relationally barren, the body of Christ becomes a living alternative network—embodied, sacrificial, local.

- Gather in real presence for prayer and table fellowship.
- Care for the poor who fall through digital systems.

- Model integrity in communication and commerce.

Such communities demonstrate that true belonging doesn't require algorithmic approval.

4. Truth: Word Over Data

When truth can be edited or generated, Scripture becomes more vital, not less.

- Memorized Scripture anchors the heart when information streams lie.
- Teaching and catechesis form minds that can detect deception.
- The Spirit, not trending code, is the believer's guide into all truth.

A people shaped by the Word cannot be re-programmed by propaganda.

5. Allegiance: Worship that Cannot Be Replicated

In a world that might stage digital miracles, the church remembers that worship is relational, not performative. It is loyalty expressed through love, not spectacle.

Refusing idolatry may someday cost comfort or status, but the first commandment has not expired. The early church thrived in an empire demanding Caesar's worship; the end-time church will, too, by worshiping Christ alone.

6. Hope: Bearing Witness, Not Waging Panic

Even if a global system claims to "save" humanity, Christians know that redemption is not a human project. They bear witness to the true Savior by:

- Practicing mercy in the midst of corruption,
- Speaking truth without hatred,
- Living with courage without despair.

The light that exposes deception is patient goodness, not political rage.

7. The Final Word
Every empire built on fear—whether digital, military, or religious—eventually collapses under the weight of its own pride. The Lamb endures. The task of His people is simple but costly:
To love the truth, serve the neighbor, and keep the faith until the kingdoms of this world become the kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ.

Miscellaneous Notes

Seven Feasts
- Passover (*Peshach*) was fulfilled in Jesus' sacrifice on the cross (on that very day).
- Unleavened Bread (*Chag HaMatzot*) was fulfilled by Jesus' sinless body in the tomb (on that very day).
- Firstfruits (*Yom HaBikkurim*) was fulfilled in Jesus' resurrection (on that very day).
- Pentecost (*Shavuot*) was fulfilled by the birth of the church (on that very day).
- Trumpets (*Yom Teruah*) may be fulfilled by Jesus' return on that very day.
- Day of Atonement (*Yom Kippur*) may be fulfilled by the final judgment on that very day.
- Tabernacles (*Sukkot*) may be fulfilled in the New Heaven and New Earth on that very day.

In the book, the Second Coming occurs on Rosh Hashanah 2033, specifically September 24.

In the book, The Great White Throne Judgement occurs on Yom Kippur in 3033, specifically on September 25.

In the book, the New Heaven and New Earth commence on Sukkot 3033, specifically on September 29.

In the book, there are the following correlations:
Israel/Judah = Israel
Babylon = USA and the World Council (and the world system in general)
Egypt = Egypt
Persia = Iran
Cush = Sudan
Ethiopia = Ethiopia
Put/Phut = Libya
Gomer/Meshech/Tubal = Turkey
Magog = Russia

If You Don't Know Jesus
You need to. Have a look at this video to hear more.

If You Already Know Jesus
Here are some places you can find resources from the author to help you grow in your relationship with Him and help others to do the same.